TRANSFORMATIONS IN GOVERNANCE

THE SURVIVAL OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Institutional Responses to Existential Challenges

Hylke Dijkstra, Laura von Allwörden,
Leonard Schütte, and Giuseppe Zaccaria

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Preface and acknowledgements

This book is the result of a five-year research project on the 'decline and death of international organizations' (called NestIOr) funded by the European Research Council (ERC) in which the four of us worked together (2019–2024). Well before it was a project, it had started as an intellectual exercise. The principal investigator of the project (Hylke Dijkstra) was curious about the 'second half' of the lifecycle of international organizations. While legions of scholars have studied the design and development of international organizations (IOs), no one really seemed to be interested in the decline and death of IOs. This was surprising as much of diplomatic history and political philosophy is about the rise *and* fall of different governance forms—once great powers, vanished kingdoms, and dissolved military alliances.

This intellectual exercise suddenly became more pertinent in 2016 because of the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump as the U.S. President. Along with demands and pressures by the emerging powers, there was a real chance that established IOs would fall apart. To study these existential challenges to different IOs, Laura von Allwörden, Leonard Schütte, and Giuseppe Zaccaria joined the project as PhD candidates working on the policy areas of climate and energy, security and defence, and trade and development. Their purpose was to go 'inside' the various IOs and trace how these existential challenges play out. They conducted 114 interviews with IO insiders, the results of which are presented in this book.

After researching the decline and death of international organizations together for more than five years, we ended up writing this book about their *survival*. What we found across our case studies is that various institutional actors within IOs—political leaders and also everyday officials—had developed proactive strategies to respond to existential challenges. They did not sit back waiting for their organizations to be dissolved but rather stepped up and adopted a range of behavioural and discursive responses. In some cases, they helped their organizations to adapt to existential pressures. In other cases, they shielded their organizations from such challenges through careful resistance strategies.

For us, survival is therefore the story and oftentimes such 'non-events' deserve more scholarly attention. The dog that didn't bark; the communist revolutions that did not happen in Western industrialized societies. But we

feel that there is something more to the title and topic of our book. For us, it is also normatively important as scholars to provide a more optimistic account of the state of international cooperation. If all scholars and pundits talk about 'the end of liberal international order' and 'the crisis of multilateralism', it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. For us, this would be a disservice to all the people in the machinery of international cooperation, who work hard every single day to address international challenges. While political philosopher Thomas Hobbes rightly notes that 'nothing can be immortal which mortals make'—this clearly also includes IOs which one day will be dissolved or fall into desuetude—we should be careful not too easily write off the organizations that provide the very fabric of international cooperation. Particularly at a moment when Donald Trump has returned to office.

Beyond funding, we need to thank a range of colleagues who have been willing to engage with our project and scholarship. Within our ERC project, we owe much to team members Maria Debre and Farsan Ghassim, who as postdocs have been instrumental for our team. Maria helped set up the project and establish our team. Her initial quantitative analyses also provided direction for our case study research. Farsan joined halfway through the project and provided much needed renewed energy for all of us. Both have also repeatedly commented on this book project, which has become better because of it. In Maastricht, we need to further thank Thomas Conzelmann, Sophie Vanhoonacker, and Esther Versluis who served as co-supervisors of respectively Giuseppe Zaccaria, Leonard Schütte, and Laura von Allwörden. They have been involved throughout the project as well and been a source of support.

A good number of colleagues and friends have taken an interest in our work by joining our kick-off workshop in Brussels in January 2020 and our final workshop in Maastricht in June 2023, serving on PhD defence committees, and by (repeatedly) commenting on our work: Johan Adriaensen, Michael

Bauer, Steven Blockmans, Inken von Borzyskowski, Richard Caplan, Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Julia Gray, Yoram Haftel, Tim Heinkelmann-Wild, Anna Herranz-Surrallés, Gisela Hirschmann, Stephanie Hofmann, Christian Kreuder-Sonnen, Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Bernhard Reinsberg, Yf Reykers, Thomas Sommerer, Soetkin Verhaegen, Stefanie Walter, Clara Weinhardt, and Carmen Wunderlich. There is now a true scholarly community that studies the decline, death, and survival of IOs in a most professional and collaborative manner. Thank you!

We have also presented our work at two dozen conferences, and we thank all the organizers, chairs, discussants, and participants. In particular, we would like to highlight two workshops where we presented earlier versions of this book. We are thankful to Tom Hunter and Stefanie Walter for hosting us at Lake Zurich for the workshop on 'International cooperation in challenging times' on 3–4 October 2022 and Stephanie Hofmann for the workshop 'Global order, international organisations and organisational options' at the European University Institute, 13–14 October 2022.

This book is informed by 114 interviews with politicians, diplomats, officials, experts, and other stakeholders at the various IOs we study. We are grateful to them for receiving us, including in videoconference calls during the pandemic, and taking us on a journey behind the scenes to comprehend the functioning of the various IOs.

As with most research, ours has been a cumulative project. Readers familiar with our work will recognize that our book builds on Hylke Dijkstra, Laura von Allwörden, Leonard Schütte and Giuseppe Zaccaria (2024). Donald Trump and the survival strategies of international organizations: When can institutional actors counter existential challenges? *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 37(2), 182–205. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2022.2136566 licensed under CC BY 4.0 and adapted here. This was a first comparative case study article among the four of us where we focused on institutional actors. This book is naturally much longer, with a more developed argument, and also other types of case studies.

Readers may also recognize some of the specific case material, such as Laura von Allwörden (2024). When contestation legitimizes: the norm of climate change action and the US contesting the Paris Agreement. *International Relations*, advance online publication. © The Author 2024, https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178231222874, which has been adapted here (This material is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder); Leonard Schütte (2021). Why NATO survived Trump: The neglected role of Secretary General Stoltenberg. *International Affairs*, 97(6), 1863–1881. https://doi.org/10.

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List of acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
COP	Conference of the Parties
CFE	Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPC	Conflict Prevention Centre
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DSB	Dispute Settlement Body
ERC	European Research Council
EU	European Union
EULEX	EU Mission in Kosovo
G7	Group of 7
G20	Group of 20
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
HCNM	High Commissioner on National Minorities
IO	international organization
IEA	International Energy Agency
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICSID	International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes
IDA	International Development Association
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IPU	integrated police unit
IR	International Relations (the academic discipline)
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
LPAA	Lima-Paris Action Agenda
MDB	multilateral development bank
MPIA	Multi-Party Interim Agreement
MIGA	Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAZCA	Nonstate Actor Zone for Climate Action
NDC	nationally determined contribution
NGO	non-governmental organization

NSC	National Security Council
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RFoM	Representative on the Freedom of the Media
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SPSU	Strategic Policy Support Unit
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNMIK	UN Mission in Kosovo
US	United States
USTR	United States Trade Representative
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Introduction

Shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the leading International Relations (IR) theorist Kenneth Waltz made the infamously wrong prediction that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) 'days are not numbered, but its years are' (1993, p. 76). With the principal threat out of the way, NATO no longer seemed to have a purpose. Waltz rhetorically asked '[h]ow can an alliance endure in the absence of a worthy opponent?' (p. 75). Against these odds, NATO survived the end of the Cold War. It adapted itself to the new security environment and NATO allies have sent military missions to Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya (e.g. Dijkstra, 2015; Johnston, 2017; McCalla, 1996; Thies, 2009; Wallander, 2000). NATO still continuously needs to prove itself. U.S. President Trump refused to endorse Article 5 and privately indicated that he wanted to withdraw the United States from the North Atlantic Alliance (Barnes & Cooper, 2019; Schuette, 2021a), while French President Macron called NATO 'brain-dead' (as cited in The Economist, 2019). Yet the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, once again, underlined the importance of NATO: Thirty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO continues to guarantee the collective defence of Europe.

NATO is just one example of the many international organizations (IOs) that have faced existential challenges, defined as challenges that potentially put their ability to perform core functions at risk. The United States, for instance, stopped contributing to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) budget in 2011, thereby depriving the organization of nearly a quarter of its resources (Eckhard, Patz, & Schmidt, 2019). The United Kingdom quit the European Union (EU) in 2020, Burundi and the Philippines the International Criminal Court, Japan the International Whaling Commission, and the United States put in motion the process of leaving the World Health Organization (WHO) during the Covid-19 pandemic (von Borzyskowski & Vabulas, 2019). Meanwhile, the World Trade Organization (WTO) finds its Appellate Body inoperable following the American refusal to appoint judges (Hopewell, 2021a, 2021b; Payosova, Hufbauer, & Schott, 2018; Zaccaria, 2022) and the organization has been in

a stalemate ever since the breakdown of the Doha Development Round in the mid-2000s.

Elsewhere in the international system, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was dealt a strong blow due to the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement under President Trump. This created fears that other states would follow the example thereby eroding global climate action (Jotzo, Depledge, & Winkler, 2018). The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), set up to mitigate East–West relations, was already on a downward trajectory long before Russia's invasion of Ukraine and is generally unable to provide common security for its participating states (Schuette & Dijkstra, 2023a). Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) demanded to be taken seriously in their Durban Declaration of 2013 and have set up alternative institutions that potentially challenge the existing postwar setup (Chin, 2014). Their view on global order has resonated with many other states leading to an expansion of the BRICS in 2024. A potent challenge comes from the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Hameiri & Jones, 2018; Liao, 2015; Ren, 2016). China has also attempted to capture key United Nations (UN) agencies and continuously challenges established UN human rights norms.

There is no shortage of scholarship discussing these existential challenges to IOs and the assault on the liberal international order more generally (e.g. Copelovitch & Pevehouse, 2019; Ferguson & Zakaria, 2017; *Foreign Affairs*, 2017; Lake, Martin, & Risse, 2021; Mearsheimer, 2019; De Vries, Hobolt, & Walter, 2021). Coming from very different theoretical perspectives, scholars show how populism, nationalism, power transitions, and the 'folly of liberalism' explain the contestation of IOs and international institutions. For John Mearsheimer (2019), the liberal international order and its international institutions were 'bound to fail' (title), as they 'contained the seeds of [their] own destruction' (p. 7). Michael Zürn (2018) and his co-authors point at the rise of international authority—and liberal intrusiveness—since the 1990s. They argue that this almost inevitably resulted in a greater popular contestation of the IOs, since IOs have been the main beneficiaries of such increased authority (cf. Börzel & Zürn, 2021; Zürn, Tokhi, & Binder, 2021).

Whatever the precise underlying causal logic, the understanding among many is that the future of IOs is bleak. Contestation might cause 'gridlock' (Hale, Held, & Young, 2013), which no longer allows IOs and other international institutions to take on urgent policy problems. It might put them on a pathway to 'decline' (Zürn, 2018, pp. 13–14, 101, 255–257) or at least make IOs less central to international relations. The ultimate way for states to show

that IOs have outlived their purpose is to disband them altogether. Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2020) finds, in this respect, that 39% of the IOs (218 out of 561) created since 1815 have formally ceased to exist (see also Pevehouse et al., 2020). Even if not formally declared 'dead', Julia Gray (2018) shows that no less than 38% of seventy international economic organizations were inactive during the period 1948–2013, thus essentially in a state of 'coma'. While the termination of major IOs remains a rare event in recent history (Dijkstra & Debre, 2022), the degree of pessimism in the academic literature is considerable (e.g. Lake et al., 2021, p. 225).

The existing literature thus discusses many of the challenges that IOs face—the rise of China, hegemonic contestation by Trump, and how populist political parties complicate cooperation—yet scant attention is paid to the IOs themselves. IOs are implicitly portrayed as both victims and hapless bystanders as international and domestic politics unfold. How IOs deal with the various existential challenges is rarely the topic of academic inquiry as such. This is surprising for two reasons. First, IOs differ significantly. While IOs have some common defining features (cf. Hooghe et al., 2017; Pevehouse et al., 2020), they also vary to very large degrees in terms of institutional design (Koremenos, Lipson, & Snidal, 2001). They are like apples and oranges—two fruits that are round and of similar size, but have a different colour, taste, and texture (Rittberger et al., 2019, p. 5). This logically requires us to study how existential challenges play out across IOs. Second, IOs are generally considered—like all bureaucracies—to have a degree of autonomy and agency, as they are intentionally put at some distance from the member states to independently implement their mandates (Bauer & Ege, 2016; Chorev, 2012; Cox et al., 1973; Hawkins et al., 2006; Reinalda & Verbeek, 2003). Even in the face of formidable challenges, IOs are not powerless actors. They have options to respond.

When taking a first look at how IOs have responded to the existential challenges touched upon in the preceding paragraphs, we indeed see considerable variation. As mentioned, NATO is an example of an IO which has adapted several times to the changing international environment after the end of the Cold War. There are, however, many other IOs that have come out of existential challenges relatively unshattered. The EU and the World Bank have respectively dealt with the challenges of Brexit and the creation of the rival AIIB in ways that have consolidated their organizations. Other IOs have, however, been less responsive. The WTO has not been able to kickstart the Doha Round or revitalize its Appellate Body after Donald Trump's first term. While the WTO continues to operate in several domains, it is considerably less central to international relations than it was during the 2000s.

The same can be said about the OSCE. As a security organization, it has not been able to address the deteriorating security environment in Europe since the 2010s.

When zooming in a bit, it becomes apparent that IOs have used a whole range of different strategies to cope with and counter existential challenges. In response to the outcome of the Brexit referendum, for instance, the European Commission appointed a high-level politician in Michel Barnier to keep the remaining EU member states together in order to resist most British demands. The World Bank leadership, on the other hand, took a much more accommodating—though proactive—perspective on the AIIB and reached out to shape this China-led institution in its own image. The UNFCCC Secretariat, to give yet another example, had gradually built a strong external support network of state, sub-state, and non-state actors supporting climate action, which was activated to counter the challenges by Donald Trump to the Paris Agreement. Other IOs were far less proactive in developing strategic responses. For instance, the WTO Director-General did little to address the looming crisis of the Appellate Body and suddenly resigned during the Covid pandemic.

What explains these different responses by IOs? Complementing the state-centric literature which mostly studies the *causes* of existential challenges, this book focuses on the role of institutional actors of IOs—IO leaders and their bureaucracies—and analyses *their abilities to formulate and implement response strategies* to existential challenges. The book argues that these central institutional actors within IOs have a strong interest in the survival of their organizations and potentially a wide arsenal of behavioural and discursive strategies to cope with and even counter challenges that put their own organizations at risk. They can help, for instance, their IOs adapt to a changing international environment, resist the populist urges, or face off competition from other IOs. The ability of institutional actors to respond and to strategically tailor responses to different types of existential challenges, however, greatly varies across IOs. While some institutional actors have considerable agency to purposefully respond to existential challenges, in other IOs their ability is severely constrained. By uncovering why some institutional actors within IOs can better answer to existential challenges than others, this book contributes to an emerging academic literature on the survival of IOs.

This book is therefore about the IOs themselves. It is about the Secretaries-General, Directors-General, and Executive Secretaries who lead IOs. But the book is equally about the middle-managers and the desk officers, who keep the machinery running, within the directorates of the international

secretariats of IOs. They too can facilitate organizational adaptation and/or resist existential challenges. The book explains why these institutional actors, who serve principally the IO rather than member state interest, respond differently when their own livelihood gets threatened. Providing detailed comparative case studies of six IOs and original data from 114 interviews, the book goes beyond the official documents and public debates. It uncovers important behind the scenes processes about the survival of IOs and international institutions. Overall, it provides a corrective to the more alarming accounts of the crisis of IOs and presents a more optimistic take on the state of liberal international order and the future of IOs as major international vehicles for cooperation: Over the last few decades IOs have survived key existential challenges and are here to stay.

1.1 The question

The last decade has been taxing for international cooperation with the rise of populism, the Trump Presidency, and the renewed assertiveness of the emerging powers. Various IOs have been challenged repeatedly in ways that put their ability to perform core functions or even their very livelihood at risk. This book studies the varying responses by the institutional actors of IOs—IO leaders and their bureaucracies—to such existential challenges. Institutional actors have a strong interest in the survival and well-being of their organizations and likely fight tooth and nail to keep their IOs relevant. At the same time, institutional actors are heavily constrained in their actions. They may not have the necessary leadership, competences, resources, or networks to respond. Furthermore, as bureaucracies, institutional actors are often slow-moving: They may not recognize existential challenges on time or are unable to formulate a purposeful response strategy. This book therefore studies the survival strategies of institutional actors within IOs and their ability to determine their own fate. It seeks to answer the research question *why do the institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges?* It is about institutional responses by IOs to existential challenges.

The examples in the preceding paragraphs of IOs facing existential challenges—from NATO to Brexit, WHO, and the Paris Agreement—have received considerable academic and public attention. This is for good reason. Existential challenges to IOs are important because these are extraordinary moments in international relations during which a lot can happen. Not just to those IOs, but to international order more generally. IOs are, after

all, institutions that bring a degree of permanence and continuity to the otherwise volatile relations between international actors. IOs reduce uncertainty, create stability, and produce collective goods—from collective defence and international justice to pandemic expertise and world heritage lists. As multilateral institutions, founded by three or more states, IOs are often designed to absorb the diverse inputs of international actors, notably from their member states, and address a range of everyday challenges. Yet existential challenges to IOs are not like everyday challenges that can be easily absorbed. When IOs are existentially challenged, in ways that put their very organizations at risk, the institutions underpinning international order are at stake.

Conceptually, it is important to define 'existential challenges' and clarify how these challenges differ from other challenges or everyday 'inputs' that go into the political system of IOs (e.g. Easton, 1957; Rittberger et al., 2019). After all, IOs constantly face demands from their membership but also from non-state actors, experts, and public opinion. Such demands are normally channelled through diplomatic routes, lobbying, and stakeholder consultations but also more public routes. Around many IOs, there are lively debates in terms of public events, think tank papers, news media, and in some cases regular demonstrations. IOs clearly have to navigate such environmental demands. Existential challenges to IOs are, however, different. They are not about states blocking the consensus on a policy dossier, or activists and lobbyists voicing their concerns. Existential challenges are about the more fundamental undermining of IOs. In this book, we define existential challenges as those that specifically *put individual IOs at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out some of their core functions.*

Existential challenges therefore include two properties. First, they are about the core functions of IOs. Unlike regular inputs into the political system of IOs, existential challenges put parts of the very political system at risk (the polity). In the ultimate case, existential challenges may result in IO termination, dissolution, desuetude, or death (Debre & Dijkstra, 2021a; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2020). But there are also scenarios where IOs turn into 'zombies'—organizations that continue to operate without much relevance to international relations (Gray, 2018). Furthermore, existential challenges can affect only part of the core functions of an IO. When the Trump administration, for instance, refused to appoint judges to the WTO Appellate Body it effectively rendered this adjudication court inoperable. The WTO continues to exist, but it can no longer carry out its core adjudication function. Second, existential challenges are about potential risks to the political system. The outcome of such challenges is not predetermined. Existential

challenges do not have to adversely affect IOs. IOs may be able to cope with or counter existential challenges. This makes it important to study the process of what happens when existential challenges to IOs arise and why IOs respond differently.

When an existential challenge hits an IO, all eyes are often immediately on the institutional actors which are the embodiment of IOs and vital for the everyday running of IOs. Through their position at the centre of IOs, institutional actors are potentially in a powerful spot to address existential challenges. And with their own jobs on the line, they are among the most motivated advocates for the survival of their organizations. Institutional actors typically include IO leaders or 'heads' (e.g. Chesterman, 2007; Cox, 1969; Hall & Woods, 2018; Kille & Scully, 2003; Mathiason, 2007; Young, 1991)—such as Secretaries-General, Directors-General, and Executive-Secretaries—and the international public administration, secretariat, or bureaucracy of IOs (e.g. Biermann & Siebenhüner, 2009; Bauer, Knill, & Eckhard, 2016; Trondal et al., 2013). Institutional actors are therefore *those actors who serve principally the IO institution rather than particular interest.* IO institutional actors thus do not include the member states meeting in the plenary organs or executive boards, nor the parliamentary assemblies or adjudication bodies (on the different IO organs: Rittberger et al., 2019, pp. 60–61). By studying institutional actors—IO leaders and their bureaucracies—the book thus focuses on the actors that make IOs go around and that play a lead role in addressing existential challenges.

By asking the research question why the institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges, we start from the assumption that institutional actors will potentially have some agency when their IOs are existentially challenged. This implies that institutional actors have a private interest in organizational survival and that they have substantial political and bureaucratic resources at their disposal. Michael Bauer and Jörn Ege (2016) have referred to this as the bureaucratic autonomy of 'will' (their autonomous preferences) and 'action' (their discretion and resources). We assume that autonomy of will is strong for institutional actors, when faced with existential challenges, as their jobs, prestige, self-esteem, and institutions are at stake (e.g. Kaufman, 1976; Strange, 1998). With respect to discretion and resources, we focus in this book on IOs that have at least 250 officials though in some of the cases even thousands of bureaucratic staff members (see also Section 1.4). We assume that these are substantial resources allowing the IO institutional actors to potentially strategize and to formulate and implement responses to existential challenges.

In trying to answer the research question, this book puts forward two propositions. First, we expect that institutional actors will respond differently to different types of existential challenges. IO institutional actors are more likely to resist direct existential challenges by powerful states and more likely to adapt to indirect existential challenges where states establish competing institutions (Proposition 1). It is particularly difficult for IOs and their institutional actors to give in to powerful states, because unilateral demands by such states may erode the very mandate of the IO or put a burden on the rest of the membership (see on 'accommodation dilemma', Walter, 2021). Faced with such types of existential challenges, it is more likely that institutional actors use their resources to try to resist powerful states through a range of discursive and behavioural strategies. In the case of indirect existential challenges to IOs, where states or groups of states set up new competing institutions ('contested multilateralism', Morse & Keohane, 2014), we expect adaptive responses by institutional actors. Once new institutions have been set up, the ship has typically sailed, and institutional actors in incumbent IOs will try to (re)establish their central position in international relations, which requires adaptation.

We therefore expect institutional actors to tailor their responses to existential challenges, yet we also expect, secondly, that their ability to pursue strategic responses will depend on their own leadership, organizational structure, formal competences, and external networks (Proposition 2). IOs and their institutional actors have been constituted very differently with a wide variety of institutional designs, which we expect will affect their institutional responses. IOs have, for instance, very different types of leaders (Hall & Woods, 2018) some of whom may be better accustomed to deal with questions of institutional survival. Strategic responses by institutional actors are further not a given when IOs come under pressure (Chorev, 2012, pp. 28–41), as institutional actors should be able to recognize the challenge on time, pick an appropriate strategic response out of a range of available options, and properly implement the response. This is a tall order as IOs and their bureaucracies can be inert (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004; Bayerlein, Knill, & Steinebach, 2020; Weaver, 2008). Going by some of the examples provided above—from high-level political leadership in the EU in response to Brexit to the UNFCCC secretariat relying on external networks, and the World Bank reaching out to the AIIB—we indeed witness a palette of different responses.

To conclude, this book addresses the question, why do the institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges? It proposes to consider the *different types* of existential challenges as well as the *ability* of institutional actors to strategically respond. Institutional actors tailor their

responses to the different types of challenges, yet their ability to do so may depend on their leadership, organizational structure, formal competences, and external networks. While some institutional actors will be motivated and at the forefront of protecting their IO, other institutional actors may not have the internal strength to do so. So even if institutional actors have major incentives to respond to existential challenges, strategic responses are not automatically forthcoming. Which institutional actors put up a fight for their organizations and which ones do not? By uncovering why institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges, this book contributes to new insights on IOs and provides knowledge about whether IOs are hapless bystanders as existential challenges unfold or active and purposeful agents.

1.2 The literature

By addressing this research question, this book contributes to the burgeoning literature on the crisis of liberal international order and the crises of IOs in particular. It takes, however, a distinctive perspective and makes two contributions. First, rather than studying the existential challenges—and their causes—as others have done, the book focuses on the responses of IOs and their institutional actors. It qualifies the extant literature by showing that institutional actors are not simply bystanders as their IOs get challenged. Second, this book questions the idea that IOs are by default slow-moving, sticky, and path-dependent organizations, gridlocked by veto-players and bureaucratic inertia. It shows that institutional actors of IOs can pursue proactive responses to existential challenges, helping their IOs to adapt and/or shielding them from the worst external pressures. Compared to the existing literature, this book thus studies the agency of the institutional actors to determine their own faith. It does so through a comparative case analysis of IOs informed by rich interview data.

Let us address these two contributions and the shortcomings of the existing literature in turn. First, much of the literature on the crises of IOs and liberal international order tries to *explain the origins of existential challenges to IOs*. Realist and domestic politics approaches are particularly vocal in debates on the liberal international order, while liberal-institutionalist scholars have focused on the changing nature of international problems. The trouble with these approaches is that they do not tell us much about IO responses to existential challenges and thereby only present us with a half answer. This is problematic as for all the challenges to liberal international order, we know

very little about the actual consequences for IOs. Indeed, the very assumptions of these theoretical approaches, such as state-centrality or a focus on the domestic level, oftentimes get in the way of understanding effects at the IO level. Yet unless we know how existential challenges exactly play out in IOs, we cannot judge their significance in the first place. There is no space here to discuss these extant debates in exhaustive terms, but it is nonetheless instructive to briefly consider the main arguments.

The 'trilogy' by John Mearsheimer (1994, 2014, 2019) on institutional institutions broadly exemplifies the realist state-centric approach. In his view, institutional institutions are a mere reflection of great power politics (1994), unable to handle China as an emerging power (2014), and the liberal international order is simply a post-Cold War liberal folly that cannot withstand the realities of power politics (2019). Throughout these arguments, IOs are either forums where great power politics plays out, or temporary vehicles for member states to pursue their collective interests (e.g. Mearsheimer, 1994, pp. 13–14; Walt, 1990). Once relations between states become less cooperative, IOs will likely suffer. Changes in the power constellation among states will also have strong repercussions for IOs. A power transition from the United States to China, for instance, will likely negatively affect cooperation and raise zero-sum questions over participation in international institutions (e.g. Gilpin, 1981; Kennedy, 1987; Mearsheimer, 2001, 2019, pp. 44–48).

Domestic politics explanations of the existential challenges to IOs are perhaps less vocal but certainly at least as prominent. In a study of the EU, Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2009) argue that the 'permissive consensus', in which elites insulated from domestic political parties and public opinion could promote cooperation, has made way for a 'constraining dissensus' in which those elites now must consider the domestic arena and 'look over their shoulders when negotiating European issues' (p. 5). The resulting politicization of international cooperation has offered opportunities for challenger political parties and 'political entrepreneurs' (De Vries et al., 2021) to blame IOs for rising inequalities due to globalization, cosmopolitanism undermining national identities, loss of sovereignty and control, and a general feeling of inefficiency. This argument is further strengthened by Michael Zürn (2018) and his co-authors (Zürn, Binder, & Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2012) who argue that the rise of authority of IOs since the 1990s has triggered politicization and legitimacy crises as IOs have relied too much on expert-based authority and arguments for their legitimation.

In addition to these realist and domestic politics approaches, a third set of liberal-institutionalist explanations focuses on the problem structure of cooperation (Keohane, 1984; 'demand and supply', Keohane, 1982;

Moravcsik, 1993). Many international and cross-border problems are temporary and fluctuate over time, the argument goes, which likely affects the relevant IOs when the underlying problems disappear. International problems have become 'harder' and more complex resulting in institutional gridlock (Hale et al., 2013). Scholars have, in this respect, questioned the very design of formal IOs and argued that we need more informal institutions and networks (e.g. Slaughter, 2005). The rise of informal forms of international governance has indeed been steep (Westerwinter, Abbott, & Biersteker, 2021). With the increasingly overlapping scope of IOs (Haftel & Hofmann, 2017), we witness a degree of competition, not just between IOs themselves, but also with other forms of international governance (Abbott, Green, & Keohane, 2016; Morse & Keohane, 2014). Such competition for the resources results in existential challenges for IOs that fail to be sufficiently focal, which in turn may lead to decline, specialization, or death (but see Reinsberg, 2025).

The origins of existential challenges for IOs and the variety in their causes are well-discussed therefore in the academic literature. Yet these approaches tell us less about how such challenges play out in IOs. Even if the logic of some of these arguments is endogenous—authority triggers politicization; or path-dependent institutions are no longer fit for purpose—these theories pay very little attention to the responses of IOs and award IOs little to no agency (Goddard et al. 2024; Kreuder-Sonnen & Rittberger, 2023). This makes them deterministic. Yet IOs are clearly not 'bound to fail'. Several IOs, as noted above, have come out of existential challenges rather unshattered. More generally, many IOs have survived systemic transitions, world wars, periods of decolonization, and various economic and financial crises (Debre & Dijkstra, 2021a; Dijkstra & Debre, 2022; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2021; Haftel & Nadel, 2024). Simply trying to explain the causes of existential challenges to IOs is therefore not enough. We also need to know how existential challenges play out within IOs and what IOs can do to respond when their livelihood is put at risk.

When it comes to the responses of IOs and their institutional actors to existential challenges, we do know from the literature that IOs are oftentimes considered as *slow-moving, sticky, and path-dependent organizations*, gridlocked by veto-players and bureaucratic inertia. The logic here, to put it somewhat crudely, is that those that want to challenge IOs will eventually encounter bureaucracy and give up as they run out of energy and political capital. Equally, IOs will be very constrained in their abilities to respond to external pressures, as they are stuck between veto-wielding member states and their own bureaucratic complexities. This is the second point where we challenge the literature. While this institutional argument explains

the persistence of IOs, even when faced with existential challenges, in our book, we highlight the actual strategic and proactive behaviour of institutional actors in IOs. Our argument is outlined below, but for now, it suffices to say that institutional actors help their IOs adapt by facilitating compromises among the member states and/or engaging in layering strategies. Bureaucratic sabotage is part of their toolkit but, as we argue, oftentimes applied strategically. It is worth reviewing some of the arguments in the literature about sticky IOs before discussing the proactive behaviour of IOs.

The argument of institutional stickiness runs deeply throughout IO scholarship. Institutions are the rules of the game that structure how states interact in IOs (cf. North, 1990, pp. 3–4), and institutions established in the past continue to dictate present-day politics. As John Ikenberry (2018) has repeatedly noted, IOs and the American-led international order, as they have developed in the postwar period, are 'easy to join' and 'hard to overturn' (p. 24). In the rationalist varietal of institutionalism, IOs and their institutional actors face an 'accommodation dilemma' where they may need to accommodate challenger states, but at the same time want to avoid creating opportunities for other states to challenge the status quo (e.g. De Vries et al., 2021; Walter, 2021; Jurado, León, & Walter, 2022). The status quo thus becomes a focal point from which it is difficult to pivot. Rationalists are also quick to point out that any change in IOs will be challenging due to the large number of principals and veto-players in IOs (e.g. Nielson & Tierney, 2003; Tsebelis, 2002). Existential challenges are therefore likely to lead to 'gridlock' in IOs (Hale et al., 2013) with limited response options.

In addition to the distributive and coordination games that member states play, scholars have also pointed out the lack of responsiveness by IOs from a bureaucratic perspective. Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore (2004) have developed the concept of 'institutional pathologies' where IOs can act in ways diametrically opposed to what their founders intended—for instance, UN peacekeeping failing to respond to genocide or the IMF deeply intruding in domestic policies. For them, we can only understand such IO behaviour by considering the bureaucratic logic within IOs. Others have made similar arguments about bureaucratic politics, organized hypocrisy, and administrative styles within IOs (Bayerlein et al., 2020; Weaver, 2008). Taken together—the difficulty of member states to reach compromises on reform and the bureaucratic inertia in the IOs themselves—these logics result according to the extant literature in a strong status quo bias and a lack of general responsiveness. Path dependency is the result. Indeed, we are regularly reminded that many IOs no longer fit their purpose and therefore lack legitimacy. The UN Security Council with its 80-year-old power constellation and

the Group of 7 (G7) reflecting the economic reality of yesteryear are cases in point.

While this institutionalist argument certainly has its merits, that is IOs can be slow-moving and sticky organizations at times, we see something else across our empirical cases. In this book, we will show that many IOs and their institutional actors were in fact rather responsive and proactive in responding to existential challenges. The eventual outcomes for IOs may well be close to the status quo, but it was hard work for those IOs and their institutional actors to defend such status quo and avert scenarios in which their organizations would decline. In addition, the member states argument of veto-players and gridlock has proven less convincing in the empirical cases where IOs were existentially challenged. In those moments of crises, the formal rules often become fluid providing more opportunities for institutional leadership to develop purposeful responses (cf. Kreuder-Sonnen, 2019; Schuette, 2024; Stone, 2011). We will develop the full argument below, and how it exactly plays out across different types of existential challenges and different types of IOs.

What appears from this review of the literature is that scholars insufficiently pay attention to the proactive responses of IOs to existential challenges. This is either because they account for too little agency to IOs in international relations, are too busy studying domestic political debates, or assume that IOs are slow-moving and too gridlocked to be able to handle existential challenges. This lack of focus on IOs and their institutional actors, however, conflicts with the key recent advances in international public administration, where scholars have started to take an interest in the inner workings of IOs. What is more, several recent single case studies seem to suggest that institutional actors play a lead and proactive role in crafting strategic responses to existential challenges (De Sa e Silva, 2021; Heldt et al., 2022; Hirschmann, 2021). This also includes some of our own work (Schuette, 2021a, 2021b; Zaccaria, 2024). This book takes the next step by explaining why the institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges. We study positive cases where we can identify proactive survival behaviour, but also the negative cases where IOs failed to respond. This book thus contributes to the literature through the comparative case analysis of six IOs and is informed by rich interview data.

In conclusion, the academic literature thus far prioritizes state-centric accounts of the crisis of liberal international order and the various existential challenges that threaten IOs and other international institutions. This does not sufficiently account for the variation among IOs and their institutional designs. Clearly some IOs will be better able to cope with existential

challenges than others. Research on IO responses, however, remains more limited. What does become clear from those studies is that institutional actors generally play consequential roles. They do so, however, to different extents.

1.3 The argument and findings

This book argues that institutional actors in IOs can play a proactive role when their organizations are put at risk. They have a strong interest in fighting for organizational survival and they have a wide range of instruments to do so. Institutional actors can help their IOs adapt in response to contestation and/or help to resist and circumvent existential challenges. Institutional actors, however, respond differently to existential challenges: Institutional actors respond differently to specific types of existential challenges (Proposition 1); and IOs are differently constituted in terms of their institutional design and institutional actors thus have different abilities to respond to existential challenges (Proposition 2). Some institutional actors can be surprisingly proactive and effective, but they do need to recognize challenges and require leadership to formulate and implement strategic responses in time. We also argue that the internal organizational structure as well as the embeddedness in external networks are relevant for institutional actors when they are faced with existential challenges. IO institutional actors tailor their responses to the specific type of existential challenge, but we need to consider the very abilities of institutional actors to strategically fight for their survival.

In this book, we provide evidence from six different case studies across three policy areas (trade and development; climate and energy; security and defence). Three of the case studies deal with the responses by international actors to direct existential challenges posed by powerful states. These focus on how WTO, UNFCCC, and NATO institutional actors responded to the Trump administration refusing to appoint judges to the Appellate Body, withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, and challenging the very rationale of NATO. The three other case studies deal with indirect existential challenges resulting from the creation of competing IOs that draw from the same resource base. The book focuses on how the World Bank, International Energy Agency (IEA), and OSCE institutional actors responded to the respective creation of the AIIB, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), and EU crisis management operations. The book thus presents evidence from different types of challenges posed to IOs across different policy areas. Across these six comparative case studies, we find considerable variation in responses by institutional actors to existential challenges.

Our starting point is that institutional actors play a central role in the lifecycle of IOs. Various scholars have already pointed out the role of institutional actors in the creation and development of IOs. We argue that institutional actors can equally be consequential actors in responding to existential challenges in order to avert paths towards institutional decline or even dissolution. Three decades ago, for instance, Oran Young (1991) pointed out that political leadership is necessary to establish international institutions. Tana Johnson (2014) furthermore compellingly shows that institutional actors often take part in the negotiations on new IOs and that they affect the institutional design of these new IOs in ways that benefit them privately. As IOs develop, over time, institutional actors have been found consequential as they can formulate new norms in IOs and help expand mandates (Debre & Dijkstra, 2021b; Hall, 2016; Littoz-Monnet, 2021; Weinlich, 2014). If institutional actors are causally important for IO creation and development, we argue they are also likely important in subsequent stages of the IO lifecycle.

Importantly, existential challenges are permissive of extraordinary behaviour by institutional actors. In normal times, IOs may face internal bureaucratic politics over limited resources and can be slow-moving. But if survival is at stake, the interests of institutional actors are likely to be more focused. In a classic in organizational studies, Herbert Kaufman (1976) notes about public agencies facing termination, '[t]hey are not helpless, passive pawns in the game of politics as it affects their lives; they are active, energetic, persistent participants' (p. 9). For IOs, Susan Strange (1998) even goes as far as to note that the job security of IO bureaucrats is the main explanation for why IOs 'never die' (title). Leonard Schütte (2024) equally notes that IOs may go into a survival mode when threatened. Indeed, in moments of crises, when many things can happen in a short period of time, formal rules become more fluid and actors other than the formal power holders can decisively move in (also Kreuder-Sonnen, 2019; Stone, 2011).

An important condition for proactive behaviour by IO institutional actors is that they clearly understand that their organization is existentially challenged. This sounds obvious, but IOs do not always see problems coming until it is too late. We argue that IO leadership by Secretaries-General, Directors-General, and Executive Secretaries is a key variable (Chesterman, 2007; Hendrickson, 2006; Kille & Scully, 2003; Park & Weaver, 2012; see also Moravcsik, 1999). Particularly in crisis situations, there needs to be direction from the top. This starts with IO leaders recognizing the existential challenge and taking the lead in formulating a response. While some IO leaders will be

more hands-on, skilled, and can rely on (personal) authority and networks or their public profile, others might not consider challenges existential until it is too late. Some existential challenges lead to acute crises, while others are more slow-burning or creeping (e.g. Boin, Ekengren, & Rhinard, 2020), which makes the recognition of existential crises less than guaranteed. Some IOs may have also experienced similar types of crises before and possess experience in how to address them.

Once institutional actors in IOs recognize existential challenges, the key question becomes how to respond. What we know from the study of IO agency and international public administration is that institutional actors have various ways to exert influence. Institutional actors have, for instance, discretion in policy implementation which states have delegated to institutional actors (Hawkins et al., 2006; Pollack, 2003). The literature also tells us that institutional actors facilitate deal-making between states (Beach, 2004) and increase the performance of IO programmes (Heinzel & Liese, 2021), while influencing the outcomes of policy (Biermann & Siebenhüner, 2009; Eckhard & Ege, 2016; Ege, Bauer, & Wagner, 2021). IOs and their institutional actors have set up public communications offices (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2018a, 2018b), adopted democratic narratives (Dingwerth, Schmidtke, & Weise, 2020), set up international parliamentary assemblies (Schimmelfennig et al., 2020), and have focused on improving their own degree of identity cohesion and hierarchy (Von Billerbeck, 2020).

It is useful to group these forms of IO agency along two dimensions in terms of response options. Institutional actors can help their IOs *adapt* to cope with existential challenges or try to *resist* and counter such pressures. Institutional actors can adopt, in this regard, both *behavioural* and *discursive* strategies (Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2022; Hirschmann, 2021; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019; see also Barnett & Coleman, 2005; Chorev, 2012; Kruck & Zangl, 2020). Institutional actors can, for instance, initiate reforms and facilitate compromise between the challenger states and the rest of the membership (adapt; behavioural). They can use agenda-setting or discretion in implementation to counter challenges and/or build coalitions with like-minded member states and non-state actors (resist; behavioural). They can use discursive strategies through their communication departments for issue framing and creating momentum for reform (adapt; discursive) or go on a public relations offensive in support of the legitimation of their organizations (resist; discursive). These are not mutually exclusive strategies. IOs can be accommodating in discourse but quietly resist behavioural change. Overall, institutional actors have a considerable toolkit available to cope with and counter existential challenges.

Table 1.1 Overview of case studies and empirical results

Cases	Staff size	Existential challenge	Institutional response	Outcome
WTO	625	Trump blocks the (re)appointment of judges to Appellate Body	No response	Appellate Body becomes inoperable
World Bank	6800	China creates the AIIB as a rival institution	World Bank internally reforms and reaches out to the AIIB	World Bank adapts and remains the focal development bank
UNFCCC	450	Trump withdraws the United States from the Paris Agreement	UNFCCC indirectly relies on external network	Recommitment of other states to the Paris Agreement
IEA	260*	Denmark, Germany, and Spain lead the creation of IRENA as a rival institution focusing on renewable energy	IEA eventually engages with climate action through layering	IEA adapts its priorities towards climate action
NATO	1000**	Trump questions Article 5, demands increased defence spending, and rapprochement with Russia	NATO leverages challenges on defence spending while resisting Russia policy	NATO comes out unshattered and allies modestly increase defence spending
OSCE	616	EU develops competing crisis management operations as East–West relations deteriorate	Belated and limited response to adapt	OSCE divests from crisis management operations and declines

Staff data are self-reported on websites, budgets, and annual reports. These data include only staff at headquarters.
*Data from Overland and Reischl (2018).
**NATO International Staff only.

The empirical cases of this book provide powerful examples of such IO responses (see Table 1.1). The World Bank, for instance, adapted its lending portfolio following the creation of the China-led AIIB. It considered that as the AIIB focused on infrastructure, it should invest more in human capital, norm-setting, and governance practices. The IEA initially resisted adaptation following the creation of the rival IRENA, but over time started to pay increasing attention to climate change through a layering strategy. The UNFCCC, when faced with U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, chose a different strategy. It focused on activating, and relying on, its large network of state and non-state actors supporting climate action. This large coalition strongly resisted the potential unravelling of the Paris Agreement through largely discursive actions aimed at the delegitimation of Trump. NATO institutional actors meanwhile leveraged the challenge posed by Trump to get the other allies to increase their defence spending, while quietly resisting Trump's demands for a rapprochement with Russia using backchannels throughout the U.S. government and also U.S. Congress.

When comparing the empirical evidence, the cases also reveal great variation across the IOs in how their institutional actors responded to existential challenges. NATO and the World Bank actors provided the most proactive response among the six IOs studied in this book. NATO actors carefully crafted a strategy to respond to the challenge posed by Donald Trump using a combination of adaptive and resistance strategies through behavioural and discursive means. The World Bank not just adapted its lending in light of the creation of the AIIB, but also helped develop the AIIB through exchanging staff and engaging in joint projects. Two other IOs, the OSCE and the WTO, had much greater difficulty in responding to existential challenges. While the OSCE was developing crisis management missions during the 1990s, the emergence of the better resourced EU as a key crisis management actor from the mid-2000s meant that the OSCE had to divest in a context of rapidly deteriorating East–West relations. The WTO failed to respond when Donald Trump started blocking the appointment of judges to the Appellate Body, which rendered the Appellate Body inoperable.

What explains these varying responses by institutional actors to existential challenges? This book argues that we need to consider the *type of existential challenges* (Proposition 1) and particularly also the *abilities of institutional actors themselves* (Proposition 2). When it comes to direct challenges by powerful member states and indirect challenges where states act through competing institutions, we see considerable differences. Accommodating challenger states tends to be difficult for IOs (De Vries et al., 2021; Jurado et al., 2022; Walter, 2021). Powerful states are, of course, customers to be taken seriously, but their demands may erode the mandate of the IO or put a burden on

the rest of the membership. Accordingly, we find that institutional actors approach direct existential challenges through behavioural resistance rather than adaptation strategies. While IO actors may want to placate challengers through discursive adaptation, in behavioural terms they are constrained. In the cases of WTO, UNFCCC, and NATO, despite variation in the proactiveness of institutional actors, we generally find resistance to challenges from the United States and President Trump.

Indirect existential challenges, where powerful member states create new rival institutions to challenge incumbent IOs, on the other hand, are more likely to result in adaptation strategies. Ultimately institutional creation is a costly act by challenger states (Jupille, Mattli, & Snidal, 2013), aimed at the longer term. They often pursue institutional creation if other cheaper options (such as the reform of existing institutions) are unsatisfactory. Institutional creation is thus a clear signal that those states engaged in creating rival institutions mean business. It also raises questions of focality in international relations, that is which IOs are most central, and the distribution of scarce resources over IOs. Incumbent IOs likely want to get in on such action or at least protect their own organization from losing resources. What is more, once rival institutions have been established, it is normally too late for incumbent IOs to resist their creation. Openly competing with rival institutions is also likely self-defeating if the membership largely overlaps. In terms of our case studies, again to different degrees, we see indeed adaptation in the World Bank, IEA, and OSCE. The specific types of existential challenges therefore inform the calculations of institutional actors when they have to devise their responses (evidence for Proposition 1).

While the type of existential challenge is important, and institutional actors tailor their responses accordingly, the constitution of the institutional actors themselves helps to explain the proactiveness and purposefulness of their responses. As noted above, institutional actors studied in the six cases of this book all have considerable bureaucratic resources (at least 250 staff members), yet this does not automatically result in careful strategic responses to existential challenges. The book analyses, in this respect, the leadership, organizational structure, formal competences, and external networks of institutional actors as key institutional variables helping to explain responses (Proposition 2). Across the empirical cases, it finds that IO leadership is particularly important, not just in recognizing existential challenges but also in formulating and implementing consistent response strategies. It appears that the embeddedness in external networks can help institutional actors in terms of survival. A fragmentated organizational structure can furthermore constrain strategic responses. Surprisingly, formal competences of institutional actors play a less important role.

Leadership by Secretaries-General, Directors-General, and Executive Secretaries is critical when dealing with existential challenges. The empirical cases of this book show that IOs strongly vary in terms of leadership and that this matters for strategic responses. The NATO case is particularly illustrative. Even before the inauguration of Donald Trump in 2017, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg lauded Trump for his 'strong message' on defence spending and pledged to 'work with President Trump on how to adapt NATO' (as cited in Nelson, 2017). Stoltenberg, as such, became one of the few international leaders to have a working relationship with Trump, which he used to the advantage of NATO. Another example of strong leadership was the case of the World Bank. The World Bank President Jim Yong Kim also understood from the beginning the challenge of the China-led AIIB to the Bank and developed a response accordingly. WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo, on the other hand, hardly engaged when the United States blocked the appointment of judges to the Appellate Body and when he did, in 2019, it was too late. The IEA similarly only started to adapt after the appointment of the new Executive Director Fatih Birol in 2015, which was six years after the creation of IRENA.

Leadership is thus overall important in recognizing the challenge and formulating a response strategy, but IO leaders should also be able to give direction to their bureaucracies and leverage all the available in-house resources. The organizational structure of institutional actors and the authority that IO leaders have internally varies, however, greatly (Bayerlein et al., 2020; Elsig, 2011; Graham, 2014; Hall & Wood, 2018). For institutional actors it matters whether they are integrated bureaucracies with clear reporting lines or a fragmented collection of directorates consisting of autonomous subunits. In the empirical cases, we find particularly that the WTO was constrained by its organizational structure in responding to the Appellate Body crisis. As an adjudication mechanism that should be insulated from state politics, the Appellate Body has its own secretariat, which is part of the WTO Secretariat, but not firmly under the authority of the Director-General. The organizational structure of the OSCE institutional actors was also kept decentralized by design with considerable autonomy for the different OSCE institutions and field operations. This constrained its responsiveness.

A key variable in the literature concerns the formal competences that institutional actors have and the levels of delegation (e.g. Hooghe et al., 2017; Tallberg, 2003, 2010). If institutional actors, for instance, have agenda-setting powers, they can propose to adapt or reform IOs in light of existential challenges. Across the empirical cases, however, the book only finds limited evidence for this. Of the six IOs, the WTO has formally the highest level of

delegated powers and NATO the lowest level (Hooghe et al., 2017), yet NATO developed the most purposeful response and the WTO the least purposeful one. This also fits in with the argument made in informal governance that formal competences take a backseat in crises (e.g. Stone, 2011). The book nonetheless finds that the formal competences of institutional actors may (indirectly) set expectations and dictate appropriate behaviour. The NATO Secretary-General, for instance, formally chairs the North Atlantic Council. This not only allows the Secretary-General to call for meetings and set agendas but also means that the Secretary-General acts as the spokesperson for the Alliance and everyone immediately looks to the Secretary-General for guidance. More generally, however, it is what IO leaders do in their positions and whether they actively lead in responding to existential challenges.

While institutional actors mostly facilitate the work of their IOs, some are also increasingly active outside the walls of their organizations. The embeddedness of institutional actors in external networks affects their ability to mobilize support in the environment surrounding IOs to counter existential challenges. Scholars have, for instance, pointed at orchestration, the use of non-state actors, and collusion with like-minded states (e.g. Abbott et al., 2015; Dijkstra, 2017; Sending & Neumann, 2006; Tallberg et al., 2013). The case studies also show empirically how such variation in external networks affects the ability of institutional actors to respond to existential challenges. Particularly, UNFCCC institutional actors have been active in building a wide network of non-state and sub-state actors, which they could use when the United States withdrew from the Paris Agreement. But NATO actors also have strong external networks including in the U.S. State and Defense Departments, with senators and house representatives across the aisle, and the think tank community. Other institutional actors are notably much less strongly embedded in external networks, such as WTO and OSCE institutional actors, even if the OSCE did set up a modest external network of think tanks and academics.

The variation in leadership, organizational structure, and external networks therefore helps us to understand why institutional actors across different IOs formulated different responses to similar existential challenges (evidence for Proposition 2). The formal competences of institutional actors surprisingly play a lesser role. Overall, the book finds that institutional actors have potentially considerable agency when dealing with existential challenges. Institutional actors, however, need to strategically choose within the range of available response options. Strategic responses do not come automatically to institutional actors even if they have sufficient bureaucratic resources. Particularly, the quality of IO leadership is important and

institutional actors tend to use different strategies depending on whether they are facing direct challenges by member states or indirect challenges through other competing institutions. To understand the survival of IOs, we therefore need to pay much more attention to IO leaders as well as the officials and bureaucrats that care for IOs every day.

1.4 The method

To sustain this argument, this book provides evidence from six comparative case studies across three different policy areas. For each of these case studies, the book traces the process from the moment that an existential challenge appears on the agenda, through the formulation and implementation of the response by the IO and its institutional actors, towards the outcome. The data used in this book come from publicly available sources and also from 114 original interviews with key policy officials and experts.

   This book seeks to explain why institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges. It is important to elaborate how we methodologically approach and operationalize existential challenges and institutional actors. To start with existential challenges, they have been defined above as those that specifically put individual IOs at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out some of their core functions. The question therefore is how we know an existential challenge when we see one. Since the outcome is not predetermined—existential challenges may result in a negative outcome (dissolution in extremis) but may also be countered—we should avoid posthocism by reasoning backwards (cf. Capoccia & Keleman, 2007 on critical junctures). At the same time, it is clear from the academic literature that the causes of existential challenges are often external to IOs, for instance when a war breaks out between two member states which subsequently results in less cooperation, and quite varied. Furthermore, some crises are acute and fast-burning while others are creeping (Boin et al., 2020) making it more difficult to determine when precisely creeping crisis becomes an existential challenge.

   To address these methodological points, this book does not survey all sorts of problems (e.g. war and conflict, hegemonic transitions, economic downturns and domestic politics) that might potentially result in trouble for IOs. Instead, it stays closer to the IOs themselves and contestations that directly and indirectly affect them. It considers, in this respect, two types of existential challenges. The first type concerns direct contestation by a powerful state. Powerful states have outside alternatives to IOs, strong informal channels

of influence within IOs as well as diplomatic and coercive means that they can deploy outside IOs. As one example of this type of direct contestation, we study in this book the Trump administration and 'America First' which not only questioned the effectiveness of many IOs and the distributive bargain, but also the very need for cooperation in the first place. The second type concerns indirect contestation by newly created competing IO. Newly competing IOs are often established by member states dissatisfied with the status quo in existing IOs (Morse & Keohane, 2014; Urpelainen & Van de Graaf, 2015). Competition is indirect in that newly created IOs draw on the same resources as the existing IOs and if they succeed in establishing themselves, it may result in a divestment by the incumbent IOs. These two types of existential challenges are further developed in the theoretical chapter, but by focusing on challenges related to IOs (rather than broader problems in international relations), this book can subsequently study how institutional actors in IOs respond.

The book furthermore only studies IOs where institutional actors have the potential to respond. If they do not have at least the potential, there is no sense in studying their responses. Institutional actors therefore need a substantial number of staff members. If IOs have only a very limited staff, it is unlikely that they can put forward purposeful behavioural or discursive responses to existential challenges. After all, staff is needed at the political and strategic level, but also in terms of facilitating policy-making, implementation, and press and public relations. The total number of staff members required is an empirical question. Debre and Dijkstra (2021a), for instance, show that IOs with as few as fifty staff members survive significantly longer than IOs with a smaller staff. They reason that IOs need at least a policy division and not just conference management, legal service, and translators to respond to existential challenges. In this book, we take a higher threshold of minimally 250 staff. According to the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, only 53 of the 534 IOs included in the *Correlates of War Intergovernmental Organizations* v3 (COW-IGO) dataset have such a bureaucratic staff. We thus only empirically focus on the top 90th percentile of IOs in terms of staff.[1] These are most-likely IOs for our argument. If we do not find purposeful responses by institutional actors in such cases, we will not find them at all. This is not to say that institutional actors with 50–249 staff members, or even below fifty staff

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[1] Along similar lines, Hooghe et al. (2017) only study 78 IOs which have sufficient authority to make a genuinely independent contribution to international relations. Zürn et al. (2021) and Sommerer et al. (2022a, 2022b) only study respectively 34, 32, and 30 IOs. While all 534 IOs collectively make up a large part of global governance, a few dozen IOs are clearly the most important ones and worth studying separately. See the termination of major IOs also Dijkstra and Debre (2022).

members, do not strategically respond to existential challenges, but simply that we look at some major case studies where strategic responses are most likely.

With these two points in mind, this book relies on comparative case studies across three policy areas (see Table 1.1 above for an overview). Case studies offer us the opportunity to provide in-depth analysis and also consider the all-important processes that take place behind the scenes in IOs. As such we can connect the dots and shed light on the important role of institutional actors and how they respond to existential challenges. At the same time, the comparative nature of our research—across six cases—allows to compare variation in how institutional actors respond to existential challenges, providing us patterns as well as insight into the idiosyncrasies of individual challenges. Through a spread of IOs across three different policy areas (trade and development; climate and energy; security and defence), we are also in a good position to say something about IO responses across the full population of IOs across policy domains. IOs in the area of trade and development are typically considered as more stable, institutionalized, and having higher degrees of authority, while IOs in security and defence are more-state driven reflecting sovereignty concerns. IOs in the domain of the environment, including climate and energy, tend to have more innovative designs based on a network structure.

This book studies six IOs that matter in international relations: the WTO and World Bank as two examples of trade and development IOs, the UNFCCC and the IEA as two IOs in the area of climate and energy, and NATO and the OSCE as examples of security and defence IOs. In line with the two types of existential challenges, we study first three IOs that have been targeted heavily through the 'America First' policies of the Trump administration. These include the WTO and its Appellate Body, the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement, and NATO. Second, we study indirect challenges coming from competing IOs that draw on the same resource base. The three cases include the World Bank which got competition from the AIIB in infrastructure lending, the IEA whose mandate was challenged by IRENA, and the OSCE whose function in common security was eroded by the developing EU crisis management policies in a context of deteriorating East–West relations.

In all of these cases, there were clear existential challenges as in the risk that these IOs would no longer be able to perform some of their core functions (e.g. adjudication, collective defence, infrastructure lending, crisis management operations and mitigating climate change), even if there was no immediate risk of outright dissolution in all the cases. The World Bank, for instance, would unlikely be dissolved as a result of the challenge of the

AIIB, but clearly its primacy in development lending was being challenged. NATO and the UNFCCC survived the first term of President Trump, but this was not a given. Trump, for instance, refused to initially endorse Article 5 without which NATO has little meaning and seriously threatened and considered to leave the Alliance. He did withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement. And even if this did not result in a cascade of further withdrawals (which previously happened with the Kyoto Protocol), it seriously set back climate action for years. In other words, each of the case studies analysed in this book clearly involved existential challenges. These were very serious events that undermined the health of these IOs and challenged their relevance to international relations, even if they did not automatically lead to dissolution.

For each case study, we engage in process-tracing by chronologically studying the process from the beginning until the end. The process consists of three steps. First, we describe the existential challenge to the IO, which is also the starting point of the analysis. Second, we discuss in detail the response by the institutional actors to the challenge. We consider the type of response (adaptation/resistance and behavioural/discursive) and explain variation in the responses on the basis of the variables identified above. Finally, we briefly discuss the outcome of the existential challenge. In other words, we tell the whole story from start to finish while systematically identifying our variables of interest. What we are after is to explain response strategies (as our dependent variable) based on the type of existential challenge and the features of the relevant institutional actors. The empirical ambition of the case studies is not necessarily to link the responses by IOs to eventual outcomes. While we generally do find an association between responses and outcomes, it remains difficult to make causal claims. The purpose of the book remains to study why do the institutional actors differently respond to existential challenges. The empirical focus of the book therefore is on the responses, not the outcomes.

In terms of empirical evidence, the book provides an in-depth analysis combining publicly available data from official documents, newspaper articles, policy reports, and secondary sources with data from 114 interviews conducted with IO officials, national diplomats and civil servants, representatives from non-state organizations, and (think tank) experts. While elite interviews are not without their problems, they also present a unique source of data to get a sense of the processes that play behind the scenes. They help us to connect dots and point at the most salient moments in a process. The interviewees have been carefully selected, mostly based on their functions, and most interviews lasted an hour. The starting point of the interviews was normally about the moment that the existential challenge appeared on the

radar of the interviewee (as in a semi-structured interview). We then let the interview run its course following up on the responses of the interviewee to gain rich empirical data and avoiding steering the interviewee in the direction of our research question (as in an unstructured interview). Due to the pandemic, most interviews were conducted via videoconference. The interviews were conducted entirely in line with the ethics requirements of our university ethics board.[2] The interview data are pseudonymous (we know the identity of the interviewees, but they are not revealed for reasons of confidentiality) and a complete list of pseudonymous interviewees has been included at the back of the book.

   In this book, we therefore link the types of challenges and the characteristics of the institutional actors to their response strategies in six case studies informed by rich empirical data. The book, however, does more than simply providing six empirical episodes of IOs that were existentially challenged. Unique is also the comparative set-up. Throughout the book it becomes clear that the comparison across the different IOs provides us with useful benchmarks to understand the varied responses of institutional actors. By comparing and contrasting the different types of challenges, institutional features, and responses, we can also better position individual cases. We compare the case studies within their respective chapters, create linkages between the empirical chapters, and return to the comparison of all findings in the conclusion.

1.5   The book

The remainder of the book consists of five chapters. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework and outlines an institutional theory of IO responses. Chapters 3–5 provide six case studies. These chapters are organized along policy areas. Chapter 3 includes IOs in the field of trade and development (WTO; World Bank). Chapter 4 focuses on climate and energy (UNFCCC; IEA). Chapter 5 studies security and defence IOs (NATO; OSCE). Chapter 6 concludes comparing all the findings and discussing implications for our understanding of the crisis and survival of IOs.

   Chapter 2 sets out the theoretical framework for this book. The first part of the chapter discusses about the different types of existential challenges

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[2] Approval by Maastricht University Ethical Review Committee Inner City Faculties (ERCIC) on 18 October 2018 and 19 December 2019 (reference: ERCIC_098_01_10_2018). Approval by European Research Council (ERC) Ethics Review on 25 October 2018 (reference: Ares(2018)5,481,894) and 24 March 2020 (reference: Ares(2020)1,725,290).

that IOs may face. It distinguishes in this respect between powerful member states directly challenging IOs and other competing IOs indirectly challenging the IO resource base. The chapter continues detailing the possible responses by IO institutional actors to these existential challenges. It identifies IO responses that focus on adaptation and/or resistance through both discursive and behavioural strategies. The chapter then discusses whether IOs and their institutional actors have such response options at their disposal. It points at the importance of IO resources, such as a sizeable bureaucracy, but also at how IO resources can be used to formulate and implement response strategies to existential challenges. It identifies the institutional features of leadership, structure, formal competences, and external networks. The chapter concludes by considering the outcomes for IOs as a result of existential challenges.

Chapters 3–5 provide the six empirical case studies of IO responses to existential challenges. These empirical chapters are organized by policy areas and as such cover a wide spectrum of IOs. The chapters are structured similarly. Chapter 3, which has a focus on trade and development, starts by analysing the existential challenge that the Trump administration posed to the WTO Appellate Body. Following his inauguration as President in 2017, Donald Trump almost immediately started to block the (re)appointment of judges to the Appellate Body, which he accused of judicial overreach. The chapter shows that no serious response was formulated by WTO institutional actors. They lacked political leadership to give direction and the organization was hampered by its fragmented structure. The outcome was that the Appellate Body became inoperable. As a second case study, Chapter 3 studies the existential challenge of the creation of the China-led AIIB to the World Bank. The response by the institutional actors in the World Bank was markedly different from those in the WTO. The World Bank leadership almost immediately recognized the challenge and adapted its operations, welcoming constructive relations with the new AIIB to ensure that development standards were met at this new institution. Over time, both IOs established a considerable number of joint projects and exchanged staff.

Chapter 4 focuses on a different policy area: climate and energy. The first case study is about the existential challenge that the Trump administration posed to the UNFCCC by withdrawing from the Paris Agreement. The fear within the climate community was that further states would also withdraw. Rather than responding to U.S. withdrawal, the UNFCCC therefore set out to prevent further withdrawals by activating its large network of like-minded state and non-state actors in support for climate action. The outcome was that not another state withdrew from the Paris Agreement and that the Agreement

was strongly re-legitimated. When President Biden took office, the United States could simply rejoin that Agreement which had been kept alive. Chapter 4 furthermore studies the case of the IEA, which had been accused of not doing enough to tackle climate change, and which was existentially challenged through the creation of IRENA. While the challenge was clear, it took a while for the IEA to respond. It was only with the arrival of the new Executive Director Fatih Birol in 2015 that IEA started adapting by including climate change much more prominently in its activities.

The final empirical chapter (Chapter 5) focuses on the policy area of security and defence. It starts by analysing the existential challenge posed by President Trump to NATO. It shows that while Trump was on the brink of announcing the withdrawal of the United States from NATO, institutional actors around Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg worked hard to discursively placate Trump selling increases in defence spending by allies as victories for him, while quietly resisting his demands for rapprochement with Russia. NATO, as such, came out relatively unshattered. Chapter 5 also studies the case of the OSCE and how it had to adjust to the increasing prominence of the EU in the area of security and deteriorating East–West relations. It finds that the OSCE, which was upgraded in 1995, deployed a considerable amount of crisis management missions during the 1990s. When the EU, a better resourced regional organization, started to develop its own crisis management operations during the mid-2000s, this challenged the role of the OSCE. Simultaneously, the OSCE and its human dimension were challenged by Russia. As the EU took over field operations and expanded its membership, the gridlocked OSCE closed many of its field activities and is on a serious pathway of decline.

Chapter 6 concludes this book. It starts by restating the research question and argument of the book. It then compares and discusses the research findings of the six case studies. It highlights that institutional actors can proactively respond to existential challenges and tailor their responses, but much depends on how they leverage their resources. They do not always recognize the challenge, which requires political leadership. We also point at the importance of a clear organizational structure as well as embedding in external networks. Based on these comparative findings, the book considers the broader implications for academic research on IOs and their survival.

2

Institutional actors and the survival of international organizations

Many IOs regularly face challenges including wars breaking out between the member states, economic downturns, power transitions between states, competition from other institutions, domestic politics, and changing international problems. During the last 10–15 years, IOs have come under particular pressure in what many have termed the crisis of liberal international order (Lake et al., 2021). All these sorts of challenges may put the survival, or at least some of the core functions of IOs at risk, yet this book argues that IOs are not without options to respond. Particularly, institutional actors within IOs—IO leaders and their bureaucracies—have a strong interest in the survival and well-being of their organizations and probably fight tooth and nail to keep their IOs relevant. At the same time, they are heavily constrained as they may not recognize existential challenges on time or do not possess the ability to formulate a purposeful response. Zooming in on IOs themselves, this book thus answers the research question of why do the institutional actors of IOs differently respond to existential challenges?

   This chapter provides the conceptual and theoretical framework. It starts by discussing the different types of existential challenges that IOs may face. While IR theories list a variety of problems in international relations that might have secondary consequences for IOs—for instance, war breaking out between states—this book focuses on existential challenges that hit IOs themselves. It identifies, first, direct existential challenges by powerful (groups of) member states, which may pose demands on or withhold support for IOs. Second, it focuses on indirect existential challenges when states establish and act through competing IOs and institutions, which draw on the same resource base and vie for the same attention, thereby indirectly affecting the incumbent IOs. As states remain, by definition, the main stakeholders of IOs, challenges such as war, popular protest, or changing cooperation problems only become existential challenges once they start to affect the calculations of member states vis-à-vis IOs. By focusing on direct contestation by powerful member states and indirect competition through other

institutions, the chapter therefore conceptually discusses two key types of existential challenges to IOs.

While the extant literature discusses such direct and indirect state-led challenges to IOs in some considerable detail, the chapter takes the next step. It starts from the assumption that IOs are purposeful actors that can strategically adapt or try to resist existential challenges. They can do so through proactive behavioural and discursive responses. Contrary to much of the literature, which focuses on the causes of state-led existential challenges, this chapter thus takes an IO-level analysis and focuses on the responses of IOs. It points out that institutional actors within IOs play a key role in this regard. They have a strong interest in the vitality and survival of their organizations. They also often occupy a central position in IOs in charge of keeping their organizations running. Institutional actors can help IOs, in this respect, adapt by initiating reforms and implementing them. They can also through public communication initiatives point at the need for adaptation and justify such change. Alternatively, they can resist and counter existential challenges by sabotaging demands by states or building resilience by insulating their IOs from such challenges. Discursive resistance is also a strategy and includes promoting IO values, the delegitimation of challenger states, or gathering public support. In other words, institutional actors in IOs are potentially consequential actors when their own organizations face existential challenges. Their responses include adaptation and/or resistance through behavioural and/or discursive means.

Strategic responses by institutional actors within IOs are, however, not automatic and they can vary widely. This chapter therefore continues providing explanations for the different sorts of responses. First, it proposes that institutional actors tailor their responses to the *different types of existential challenges* (Proposition 1, see Section 2.5). All else being equal, institutional actors are likely to resist the direct challenges by powerful states because giving in might erode core mandates and also result in other members making demands of their own. When faced with indirect challenges through the creation of competing alternative institutions, IO institutional actors are more likely to opt for adaptive responses. The creation of new institutions is costly and a clear signal that states mean business. Incumbent institutions may want in on the action or at least want to avoid challenges to their resource base. Second, it proposes that the ability of institutional actors to strategically respond to existential challenges varies on *their institutional features* (Proposition 2, see Section 2.5). Informed by the literature on international public administration, this chapter puts forward four key factors that may affect whether international actors can pursue purposeful responses.

In terms of institutional features, this chapter first discusses the importance of leadership, which is an important overarching variable. Institutional actors in IOs will need to recognize these existential challenges, formulate responses, and implement them. The chapter therefore expects that institutional actors need to have IO leadership to recognize challenges, direct the bureaucracy, facilitate the relations between member states, and develop relations outside the IO. In addition to leadership, the chapter develops expectations around the organizational structure of the bureaucracy (internal strength of institutional actors), the formal competences of institutional actors (their role and authority within the IO), and the embeddedness in external networks and relations with like-minded actors (an external resource base). Institutional actors that score high on leadership, this chapter proposes, and have a clear organizational structure, formal competences, and external networks are more likely to pursue strategic responses. The chapter also outlines, in this respect, how different institutional features are likely to determine different institutional responses.

The chapter finally discusses the potential outcomes for IOs as a result of existential challenges. It distinguishes three types of outcomes. First, since existential challenges put the survival or some of the core functions of IOs at risk, one obvious outcome for IOs is decline or dissolution. IO institutions may become inoperable or IOs may no longer be able to fully carry out their mandates. As such they may become less central to international relations. Second, IOs may adapt as a result of challenges by powerful member states and competing IOs. This implies that their institutions or mandates will look different. Finally, IOs may proactively seek to maintain and defend the status quo. A recommitment to the core functions of an IO may therefore be a third outcome. The chapter argues that the responses by institutional actors are likely consequential for these outcomes. At the same time, the chapter notes that it is not always possible to causally link responses by institutional actors to outcomes, as many of the available responses are indirect, for instance, through discursive means or the involvement of external actors. Yet, while this book is principally interested in explaining the different types of responses by institutional actors, the book would be incomplete if we were to ignore the outcome of existential challenges to IOs.

The chapter therefore develops a theory on the survival of IOs by outlining the conditions that explain why some institutional actors proactively respond to existential challenges. It starts with the different types of existential challenges to IOs. It continues with the responses of IOs and their institutional actors to such challenges before discussing the features that affect the ability of institutional actors to respond. The chapter then discusses different

outcomes for IOs. The chapter concludes by looking forward to the next chapters and how this book empirically examines this theory on the survival of IOs.

2.1 Different types of existential challenges

As a starting point, it is important to identify the different types of existential challenges that IOs potentially face. IR theories have pointed at a variety of challenges that put the core functions of IOs at risk. This section argues that such challenges become *existential* challenges once they start to affect the calculations of member states, resulting in increased demands on the IO or reduced levels of support, with the potential risk that IOs can no longer productively carry out some of their core functions. There are two prominent types of existential challenges. First, powerful member states can directly contest the status quo by changing their demands and support for IOs. Second, groups of member states can establish and act through competing IOs and other institutions, resulting in indirect demands and support for IOs. Increasing demands on IOs can lead to gridlock and a situation where IOs are no longer able to effectively implement their mandates. Reduced support for IOs can take the form of a loss of resources or even member state withdrawals. Increased demands and reduced support can therefore put the core functions of IOs at risk.

2.1.1 Existential challenges to international cooperation

Much of the contemporary literature on the crisis of IOs and liberal international order focuses on trying to explain the origins of the existential challenges (see also Chapter 1). IR theories are, in this respect, helpful. While a few explicitly offer mechanisms about the vitality, survival, decline, and termination of IOs, they do provide perspectives on what IOs are and how their lifecycles may develop. IR theories have pointed, for instance, at divergent member state positions and conflict as causes undermining the viability of international institutions (e.g. Mearsheimer, 1994; Walt, 1990), changes in power constellations among states as disrupting existing cooperation (e.g. Gilpin, 1981; Kennedy, 1987; Mearsheimer, 2001), the changing nature of the problem structure requiring adaptation (Jupille et al., 2013; Keohane, 1984; Koremenos et al., 2001; Kruck & Zangl, 2020; Lipscy, 2017; Milewicz et al., 2018; Moravcsik, 1993), gridlock and bureaucratic inertia creating

inefficiencies (e.g. Barnett & Finnemore, 2004; Hale et al., 2013), competing institutions (Abbott et al., 2016; Downs, 1967; Morse & Keohane, 2014), and pressures from domestic politics as an increasingly constraining dissensus (e.g. De Vries et al., 2021; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Lake et al., 2021; Zürn, 2018). In other words, there are many causes that can potentially put the core functions of IOs at risk.

Changes in the international system, the nature of cross-border and international problems, bureaucratic inefficiencies, or domestic pressures can become *challenges* for IOs when they start affecting the calculations of member states about the (perceived) benefits and costs of international cooperation. As in any political system, IOs receive inputs from a variety of actors (Easton, 1957, 1965; Rittberger et al., 2019). Governments, parliamentarians, interest groups, experts, civil society, and the public may pose demands and provide support for IOs. Such inputs are naturally informed by the interests of these specific actors, but also by feedback from the outputs of IOs, and the broader environment in which IOs operate (Rittberger et al., 2019). The plurality of actors is important to many IOs and different actors can put pressures on IOs—protesters challenging the legitimacy of the G7 and scientists demanding more climate action on the basis of their research—but ultimately the member states remain the key constituents. Indeed, the standard definition of IOs has three or more states as members (Pevehouse et al., 2020). States hold the votes and provide the (biggest chuck of the) budget across the very large majority of IOs. They can also recontract and dissolve IOs. Non-state actors can thus jump up and down as much as they want, but as long as the member states are happy, IOs will not be fundamentally challenged. When the member states, however, become responsive to pressures by other actors, or when they have input of their own, IOs need to pay careful attention.

Member states channel their input into IOs through demands and support (Easton, 1957, 1965). In terms of demands, they naturally have the regular diplomatic and decision-making channels at their disposal including by speaking up in the IO organs such as the plenary meeting or the executive boards. Member states can furthermore 'politicize' their demands by making their demands known during the top-level IO bodies at the level of ministers or even heads of state and government and/or publicly demanding things from IOs (e.g. Zürn et al., 2012). The support of member states for IOs is equally relevant and indeed often depends on whether demands are met. Member states can support the policy-making process in IOs, support IOs in public, and provide voluntary budgetary contributions on top of the assessed contributions. Importantly, member states can also withdraw

their support when they are no longer convinced that IOs are responsive to their demands. This can include leaving the IO altogether. Through their demands and support, member states therefore channel their inputs into IOs. Increased demands and/or decreased support provide IOs with challenges.

Member state challenges, and changing inputs, are 'the bread and butter' of IOs. IOs are designed precisely to convert inputs of different member states into collective output. Indeed, the whole point of IOs is to bring together member states whose interests are neither mutually exclusive nor harmoniously in agreement (Rittberger et al., 2019, p. 16). After all, if member states perfectly agree, there is no need for collaboration or coordination and there are no transaction costs to be reduced by IOs. Different IOs naturally deal differently with member state inputs, but granting IOs a degree of authority through pooling and delegation is an often-used format (Hooghe & Marks, 2015). It is therefore important to distinguish between everyday challenges for IOs and *existential challenges* in which member states potentially put the ability of IOs to perform their core functions at risk. In Chapter 1, we have already provided a definition of existential challenges and discussed their properties. In what follows, we discuss two concrete types of existential challenges that IOs need to respond to: direct existential challenges by powerful states and indirect existential challenges where (groups of) states set up competing alternative institutions.

2.1.2 Existential challenges by powerful member states

The first type of existential challenges studied in this book is direct challenges by powerful member states within IOs. Powerful member states or powerful groups of member states are those that have outside alternatives and are vitally important to the functioning of IOs (Stone, 2011, p. 11, 14). If they start seriously increasing their demands or reducing their support, IOs are likely to be existentially challenged. In many IOs, the United States is the most powerful state. Not just in terms of its votes and contribution to IO budgets but also for the fact that it is central to sustaining the liberal international order, including through military means (e.g. Ikenberry, 2011). Since many IOs are dependent on the active participation of the United States, challenges by this powerful member state potentially put the core functions of IOs at risk. The United States is, however, not the only powerful state around. The emerging powers, and most notably China, have also explored their outside alternatives in the last ten years and have made serious demands on IOs. In previous decades, countries acted as a group to demand a New International

Economic Order, which presented a potentially existential challenge to the then-dominant IOs. In other words, there exists a variety of powerful (groups of) member states that can potentially existentially challenge IOs.

The causes of existential challenges by powerful member states vary. Much of the academic literature on the crisis of IOs focuses on the effectiveness of cooperation and distributional concerns. For instance, powerful member states such as the United States may act as (regional) hegemons and therefore carry a large share of the cooperation costs (Olson, 1965). They may object to 'exploitation by the weak' and push for a more equitable bargain. NATO has long been cited as an example (Olson & Zeckhauser, 1966; Oneal, 1990; Sandler & Shimizu, 2014), but Donald Trump has also contested the Universal Postal Union for providing preferential rates to developing countries, notably China. Apart from dissatisfaction with distributive bargains, powerful member states may object to the institutional status quo, for instance, the emerging powers, which have questioned IOs with representation based on historical legacies (Hurrell, 2006; Kahler, 2013; Stephen, 2014). Powerful states may furthermore challenge IOs that create, in their eyes, insufficient value due to bureaucratic inertia and ineffectiveness. Existential challenges thus come from powerful member states dissatisfied by what IO policies and institutions offer to them. Powerful member states have to compare the benefits and cost of acting through IOs with those of unilateralism (Abbott & Snidal, 1998) or alternative institutions (see Section 2.1.3).

There is less academic literature on how systemic changes in the international system and a changing rationale for cooperation result in existential challenges by powerful member states. Apart from extensive work on vote-buying (e.g. Dreher, Sturm, & Vreeland, 2009), it is not fully clear how geopolitics and the conflicts between the member states exactly play out for IOs (but see Drezner, Farrell & Newman, 2021; Farrell & Newman, 2019). Nevertheless, examples such as the Sino-American spat over the WHO in the midst of Covid-19, with the United States not just cutting funding but also setting in motion a withdrawal procedure, show their importance. The decline of the OSCE due to persistent gridlock in a consensus-based organization as a result of geopolitical conflict is yet another example (Schuette & Dijkstra, 2023a). Furthermore, the changes in power constellations, including after the Second World War, resulted in a clear reordering of global governance and a reduced demand for older IOs (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2021). Powerful states may also challenge IOs based on the changing structure of cross-border problems. Pressure from the United States on the World Bank to include environmental targets in projects from the 1980s (Nielson & Tierney, 2003) is an example.

Direct existential challenges by powerful member states can take the form of both increasing demands on IOs and decreasing support. Powerful member states may, for instance, demand changes in the treaties, policies, and institutions of IOs. They can do so through the regular IO channels and other diplomatic channels, but they can also pose their demands publicly. Because there may be a zero-sum aspect to such demands, or because giving in to such demands is likely to lead to more demands, the outcome of such demands may be a gridlock (Hale et al., 2013) in which IOs get paralysed in their ability to carry out their core mandate. When demands are not met, powerful member states may also reduce their support for IOs. This can be about withdrawing public support for IOs, but more fundamentally powerful states may reduce their commitments to or stop complying with IO policy. This may create a negative spiral. Likewise, powerful states may reduce their funding (voluntary or suspend assessed contributions) or withdraw their membership altogether. If powerful member states are vitally important to the functioning of IOs, this inevitably results in an existential challenge to those IOs.

2.1.3 Existential challenges by competing institutions

The second type of existential challenges concerns indirect challenges where states establish or act through competing IOs or other international institutions. When competing institutions take over part of the mandates and responsibilities of IOs, this in turn may erode the resource base of those IOs and their focal position in international relations. This can result in a situation where IOs are at risk of no longer carrying out some of their core functions. Research into the area of overlapping institutions is relatively recent and it has pointed to multiple explanations. One has to do with the increasing complexity of international governance trying to address and manage all sorts of cross-border problems. Many IOs have increased their scope over time (e.g. Hooghe et al., 2017) while simultaneously complex regimes of treaties and other institutions have emerged (Aggarwal, 1998; Raustiala & Victor, 2004). Furthermore, due to gridlock in formal IOs, states have increasingly resorted to informal forms of governance, thereby creating an even denser web of governance institutions (Abbott et al., 2016; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013; Westerwinter et al., 2021). Finally, due to dissatisfaction with the existing institutions, states have created new IOs and institutions, sometimes with an explicit competitive purpose in mind for forcing change upon the incumbent IO (Faude & Parizek, 2021; Hameiri & Jones, 2018).

The problematic of overlapping institutions thus can have different causes, as the changing nature of cooperation problems may create demands for new institutions and changes in power constellations may likewise result in new cooperation patterns between states. In this book, however, we specifically focus on intentionally competing institutions where states create new institutions due to their dissatisfaction with the performance of the existing IOs. By creating new and competing institutions, states engage in the 'politics' of international regime complexity (Alter & Meunier, 2009), which allows for forum shopping but also provides states with more credible outside alternatives. Julia Morse and Robert Keohane (2014) have introduced us, in this respect, to 'contested multilateralism', which occurs 'when states and/or non-state actors either shift their focus from one existing institution to another or create an alternative multilateral institution to compete with existing ones' (p. 387). It should be noted that establishing new IOs or other institutions that compete with existing IOs tends to be a costly exercise and is rarely the preferred option for states (Jupille et al., 2013). That also implies that if states go to great lengths of negotiating new IOs rather than renegotiating existing ones, they are clearly dissatisfied and are also willing to spend resources to change the status quo.

Creating competing institutions, as an indirect state-led existential challenge, presents thus only a subset of overlapping institutions. Indeed, recent scholarship shows that institutional density can simply imply a significant demand for cooperation in a particular policy area (Abbott et al., 2016; Reinsberg, 2025; Reinsberg & Westerwinter, 2023). IOs may also tap into the resources of overlapping institutions, for instance, through joint projects, thereby increasing their performance and vitality. Nonetheless, setting up competing institutions remains a key strategy for dissatisfied states or groups of states, even if only as a signalling device to highlight discontent with incumbent institutions (e.g. Faude & Parizek, 2021). When identifying indirect existential challenges, through the creation of such competing institutions, it is therefore important to pay attention to the intentions of the states going through such outside alternatives. At the same time, whether newly created institutions will indeed become competing institutions depends partially on the responses of incumbent IOs to new challenger IOs and should therefore not be treated in deterministic terms. Newly created overlapping institutions present an existential challenge in that they *potentially* provide competition for resources and the focality of incumbent IOs.

Competing institutions may challenge IOs over mandate and responsibilities (who does what?) and vie for the same political and public attention. This may pose an existential challenge for IOs when they are at risk of losing part of

their core mandates and/or their focal position in international relations. The emergence of the EU as a security actor during the 1990s seriously affected the operations of the OSCE and even put the Western European Union out of business. Since competing institutions also often draw on similar resources, provided by the same member states, they may erode the support of states for IOs. States may, for instance, reduce their funding support for IOs or eventually withdraw and take their business elsewhere. In terms of the channels for demands and support for IOs, existential challenges by powerful states and competing institutions are therefore similar. The logic of competing institutions is, however, indirect: States increase their demands on IOs and reduce their support because of the presence of an outside competitor.

Direct challenges by powerful states and indirect challenges where member states act through competing institutions are therefore two types of existential challenges for IOs. They are ideal types and not the only types of challenges. Importantly, they do differ for IOs in terms of their impact, and we will discuss later in this chapter how institutional actors tailor their responses to these specific types of challenges (see Proposition 1 in Section 2.5). It suffices to say for now that direct challenges of powerful states often contest the core mandate of IOs or the distributive bargain among the member states. This makes it difficult for IO institutional actors to accommodate such challenges (e.g. all member states would probably like to pay less into the IO budget). The indirect challenges, where states act through alternative institutions, on the other hand, are more difficult to resist for incumbent IOs as it means that member states are taking their business elsewhere. This book thus proposes that these different types of existential challenges require different responses by IO institutional actors. In the remainder of the chapter we discuss how.

2.2 Different types of IO responses

Faced with different types of existential challenges, the important question becomes how IOs can respond. We argue that they essentially have two options: IOs can try to accommodate the existential challenges and try to adapt to a changing international environment, or they can resist (or ignore) the challenges. They can do both through behavioural and discursive strategies (Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2022; Hirschmann, 2021; Stimmer & Wisken, 2019; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019; see also Barnett & Coleman, 2005; Chorev, 2012; Kruck & Zangl, 2020). Institutional actors within IOs play a key role in formulating and implementing such responses. Importantly,

these are not mutually exclusive responses. IOs can, for instance, be accommodating and sympathetic in public to contesting parties but quietly resist meaningful behavioural change. We expect that institutional actors will try to strategically tailor their responses to the specific type of existential challenge. They are more likely to resist direct challenges by powerful states and adapt to indirect challenges through competing institutions. Not all options, however, are likely available to all IOs. Indeed, the ability of institutional actors to respond varies depending on their institutional features. We will discuss such explanations for variation in the responses below, but it is important to first outline the arsenal of potential response options that institutional actors have.

2.2.1 Adaptation and resistance

It is worth to start with *adaptation*, which is an important option for IOs that are existentially challenged or, more generally, face a changing international environment. As the sociologist Aldrich (1999) notes, 'an organization that cannot change in fundamental ways will constantly be at risk, if its environment is evolving and it cannot keep pace' (p. 194). Organizational adaptation can thus be defined as 'intentional decision making undertaken by organizational members, leading to observable actions that aim to reduce the distance between an organization and its … environments' (Sarta, Durand, & Vergne, 2021, p. 44). For IOs there is a policy and an institutional aspect to adaptation. IOs can adapt their policies to a changing environment, for instance, NATO, which adjusted its mandate after the end of the Cold War (e.g. Dijkstra, 2015; Johnston, 2017; McCalla, 1996; Thies, 2009; Wallander, 2000;). They can adapt their institutional structures as well, for instance, to improve efficiency or representation in case of changes in the power constellation of the environment. Adaptation is a response for IOs to the two types of existential challenges mentioned above. IOs can adapt by being responsive to direct demands from powerful members (Hawkins et al., 2006) but also as a result of indirect threats to the IO resource base posed by competing institutions.

While adaptation shows responsiveness to the demands of member states, organizational *resistance* can be defined as intentional decision-making undertaken by organizational members 'moving in the direction of maintaining the status quo' (Piderit, 2000, p. 784). IO resistance and disobedience to the membership—like resistance to change in the management literature— are often seen negatively (as states are generally considered 'the principals'), but it may well be that IOs prioritize their core mandate, maintain their

organizational autonomy, or adhere to higher normative or expert-based principles. Furthermore, IOs face a collective principal consisting of multiple member states with conflicting interests (Nielson & Tierney, 2003) and the majority of members may wish to resist demands by the challenger. Organizational scholars furthermore point out that constant adaptation to the always changing demands of the environment is also risky for the survival of organizations as organizational adaptation is, in fact, hard to achieve (see for a review, Boin et al., 2017). Resistance is therefore a response in which IOs try to proactively counter existential challenges to maintain the status quo. This includes IOs which insulate themselves from the demands of the powerful member states and oppose the creation of newly competing IOs.

In addition to adaptation and resistance, IOs may also *not respond* to existential challenges. While inaction can be a strategic response by IOs and other organizations, particularly when they do not have a dog in the fight (Hirschmann, 2021; McConnell & 't Hart, 2019), it is not a strategic response when faced with an existential challenge. After all, existential challenges, by definition, put individual IOs at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out some of their core functions. IOs therefore always have a dog in the fight. IOs and their institutional actors may, of course, want to maintain the status quo, keep a low profile by 'hunkering down' (Hirschmann, 2021), play for time, or let member states and external non-state actors have their fights. But these are intentional resistance strategies as discussed above. If IOs do not respond at all, it is because they do not have the ability to cope with and counter those existential challenges, for instance because of organizational inertia. It is thus important to underline that IOs may not always respond to existential challenges, which we will further address below.

Apart from the distinction between adaptation and resistance, it is useful to distinguish between behavioural and discursive responses (e.g. Stimmer & Wisken, 2019; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019).[1] *Behavioural responses* by IOs to existential challenges include the actions that IOs undertake to cope with and counter existential challenges. In terms of adaptation, this may, for instance, include the reform of existing institutions, creating new bodies, or changing the substantive policies (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019, p. 588). Behavioural responses in terms of resistance may include strategic agenda management, implementing policies in a way that diverges from the mandate given to IOs,

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[1] Other scholars add a third category (institutional practices) which they consider a subset of behavioural practices. We find this less convincing, as in social science we normally distinguish between actors (the players) and institutions (the rules of the game) and only the former can develop intentional strategies and responses. We therefore stick with discursive responses (what actors say) and behavioural responses (what actors do).

or simply 'sabotage'. Behavioural responses, in this respect, often stay 'below the radar' (Stimmer & Wisken, 2019, p. 521). They may also include resilience building or hedging strategies that help IOs insulate and protect themselves from existential challenges as they unfold. Behavioural responses are thus about the things IOs do to adapt or resist.

Discursive responses by IOs are about the things that IO actors, mostly institutional actors but also the intergovernmental bodies such as the plenary organs or executive board (Gronau & Schmitke, 2016), say in response to existential challenges. Discursive responses are aimed at affecting the discursive debate about the meaning of state contestation or the creation of new competing IOs (Stimmer & Wisken, 2019, p. 520). They include the framing of issues as well as justifications and the (de)legitimation of actors and behaviour (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019, p. 588). Contrary to behavioural responses, which may remain hidden not just from the public but also from insiders within IOs, discursive responses are to be found in official texts and public communication (ibid.). This can focus on the need for adaptation or justify adaptive behaviour, but they can also be aimed at resisting and countering existential challenges, for instance, by promoting the work of the IO, delegitimizing challenger states, or competing for attention with newly created IOs (Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2022). Discursive responses are thus about the things IOs say to adapt or resist.

2.2.2 Responses by institutional actors

When it comes to the four types of IO responses, institutional actors have potentially a key role to play. First, institutional actors within IOs have a strong interest in the vitality and indeed survival of their organizations. While bureaucratic preferences on policy issues are not always clear (e.g. Abbott et al., 2021; Barnett & Finnemore, 2004; Dunleavy, 1985; Ege, 2020), with their own jobs on the line and institutions at risk, they likely are among the most motivated advocates to cope with and counter existential challenges. Second, institutional actors often occupy a central position in IOs, vital for the everyday running of IOs, acting as the 'guardian of the treaties', keeper of the archives and 'institutional memory', and being the external spokesperson for the organization. As the embodiment of IOs, all eyes are often immediately on the institutional actors and whether they can provide cues on how the IO should respond. Institutional actors are therefore potentially in a powerful spot to address existential challenges and are also often expected to take the initiative.

So, what can institutional actors do? The first type of response concerns *behavioural adaptation* (see Table 2.1). Institutional actors help to adjust the mandate or the institutions of the IO. They can initiate reforms and facilitate compromise between the challenger states and the rest of the member states. Institutional actors are normally skilled at such tasks, as they have been established often precisely to reduce the transaction costs of cooperation and facilitate policy-making amongst the member states (Beach, 2004; Hawkins et al., 2006; Johnson, 2014; Pollack, 1997; Tallberg, 2002). They are not just the central information hub in most IOs but also have superior process expertise on how to achieve institutional bargains and they possess expert bureaucracies which can provide the membership with relatively impartial policy expertise. Institutional actors can therefore identify zones for possible agreement and compromise between challenger states and the rest of the membership. Institutional actors can drive, in this respect, different forms of IO behavioural adaptation including positive-sum adaptations through layering, where new policies or institutions are added to existing ones, or conversion processes, where rules are differently interpreted and enacted upon (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, pp. 16–19).

Discursive adaptation presents a second type of response that institutional actors can pursue. Institutional actors can publicly stress the need for adaptation in light of existential challenges and underline the validity and legitimacy of the arguments made by the challenger states (Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2022). They can frame, prioritize, and politicize certain issues

Table 2.1 Examples of responses by IO institutional actors

	Behavioural	**Discursive**
Adaptation	• Facilitate compromise between the member states on mandate or institutional change • Develop synergies with competing IOs	• Frame, prioritize, and politicize the need for adaptation • Placate challenger states and adopt joint communications with competing IOs
Resistance	• Build resilience to protect and insulate IOs • Sabotage efforts by challenger states and competing IOs	• Justify the IO and position the IO as the focal institution • Delegitimize challenger states and competing IOs

in their public discourse. While the role of institutional actors with regard to behavioural adaptation is long-standing, the engagement of institutional actors with public communication is more recent. Nevertheless, institutional actors across IOs have invested considerably in their public profile over the last decades. They have invested in public communications offices (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2018a, 2018b) and they are active on social media. IO leaders also have increasingly public profiles and regularly speak to the press and communicate via social media. These public channels allow institutional actors to bypass member state governments and stress the need for adaptation, justify or frame issues also in the domestic political arenas.

Behavioural and discursive adaptation go often hand in hand for institutional actors as responses to existential challenges. Through discursive adaptation responses, institutional actors can pave the ground and create momentum for behavioural adaptation. Similarly, behavioural adaptation may need to be justified through discursive strategies, precisely because adaptation disrupts established understandings among the relevant actors (Cornelissen, Holt, & Zundel, 2011). The use of discursive framing and narratives can, in this respect, sustain adaptation processes (Bartel & Garud, 2009). At the same time, these two types of responses can also be used separately (Stimmer & Wisken, 2019, pp. 522–524). Institutional actors might prefer a quiet compromise to behaviourally adapt the IO and leave the public victories to challenger states. Alternatively, it may be much easier for institutional actors to provide discursive adaptation and to change tone but not to behaviourally adapt. The UN Secretary-General, for instance, might call for the reform of the Security Council and call the power constellation in this UN organ outdated, but not actually make a serious effort at the UN Charter amendment which it requires. Indeed, Tallberg and Zürn (2019, p. 588) note that behavioural and discursive practices may be 'sincere or manipulative in their intent'.

Behavioural and discursive adaptation contrast with behavioural and discursive resistance, which are different types of responses for institutional actors. The response of *behavioural resistance* focuses on activities to counter existential challenges in order to maintain the status quo. Just as institutional actors play potentially a key role in behavioural adaptation, they use the same instruments to frustrate and sabotage attempts by challenger states to reform institutions or policies. These 'inertias' in organizational adaptation are well-known and institutional actors with a longer time horizon may simply sit out challengers. Institutional actors may, however, also engage in active resilience-building responses, which include protecting and insulating

IOs from the demands of the powerful member states. Similarly, IOs may actively oppose the creation of newly competing IOs by fighting over territory and turf and frustrating the development of possible interorganizational relations.

The final type of response concerns *discursive resistance* by institutional actors. Just as they can acknowledge challenger states and underline the need for adaptation, institutional actors can also delegitimize and downplay the existential challenges posed by powerful states (e.g. Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2022). They can seek to undermine the position of states by targeting the domestic public or rather justify their own organization and policies, for instance, by providing factual information. Institutional actors can also use discursive resistance in fighting for public attention when facing off newly created competing IOs. For instance, through public communication, they can position themselves as the focal institution (Jupille et al., 2013) on a certain issue area. For discursive resistance responses, institutional actors can rely on the same public communication departments and public engagement by IO leaders as they use for the discursive adaptation strategies.

As with adaptation, behavioural and discursive resistance by institutional actors can go hand in hand. Institutional actors might want to aggressively push back existential challenges and can thus simultaneously use all the tools they have at their disposal. Through discursive responses, institutional actors may also justify why they are resisting IO reform and adaptation. At the same time, these can also be used as separate types of responses. Institutional actors may, for instance, quietly resist and sabotage efforts by challenger states, while perhaps being more accommodating in public. On the other hand, institutional actors may also need to be fierce in their public response, for instance, to safeguard the core values of IOs, but may be more accommodating in behavioural terms.

Institutional actors thus potentially have four types of responses they can use when faced with existential challenges. These responses are clearly not mutually exclusive, as discussed above. Institutional actors may use them in tandem. They can even combine adaptation responses with resistance responses. At the same time, it is clear that these responses come as trade-offs that need to be carefully weighed. Walter (2021) and her co-authors (De Vries et al., 2021; Jurado et al., 2022), in this respect, point at an 'accommodation dilemma'. IOs and their institutional actors may need to accommodate powerful challenger states, particularly when they are largely dependent on such states for their resources (Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2022), but this may subsequently also create opportunities for other states to challenge the

status quo. Opening up a previously carefully crafted compromise between states, or allowing challengers to erode core IO mandates and values, is simply a risky strategy for institutional actors. We therefore expect that institutional actors will find it difficult to adapt when faced with direct challenges by powerful states (Proposition 1, see also Section 2.5). They will more likely use discursive and behavioural resistance strategies to respond to this particular type of existential challenge.

While the accommodation dilemma—which institutional actors face with direct existential challenges by powerful states—makes them likely to prioritize resistance strategies, we expect that institutional actors are more likely to opt for adaptation in the case of indirect challenges through competing institutions. The creation of new institutions is costly for states (Jupille et al., 2013) and requires the buy-in of multiple states. Creating new institutions therefore not just sends a powerful signal of dissatisfaction by the challenger states (Faude & Parizek, 2021), it is a strong commitment by a group of states to do things differently. When states thus follow through and set up competing institutions and indirectly challenge incumbent IOs, the ship has sailed. Resisting such developments will likely be counterproductive for IOs, as they oftentimes continue to rely on the challenger member states for their resources. The better strategy is thus to adapt, reach out to the competing institutions, and try to get in on the action while simultaneously safeguarding focality in international relations (Proposition 1, see also Section 2.5). It is, therefore, likely that IO institutional actors need to consider trade-offs when they formulate and implement their responses and are likely to tailor their response to the type of existential challenge posed.

While the emphasis has been on how institutional actors respond to existential challenges—which is the topic of this book—it is important to underline that institutional actors are rarely alone in their responses to existential challenges. Member states are almost always divided on existential challenges. Some may bandwagon with challenger states and forum shop their way around, but many will likely stand to lose as well from existential challenges to IOs. This allows institutional actors to work with those like-minded member states (Dijkstra, 2017). Beyond the formal members of IOs, institutional actors can also work with non-state actors outside of the IOs, such as like-minded non-governmental organizations, both directly and indirectly through orchestration (Sending & Neumann, 2006; Abbott et al., 2015). Such cooperation with other actors helps institutional actors in insulating their IOs from existential challenges in behavioural terms but may also help them to amplify their discursive messages. Whether and the extent to

which institutional actors can actually work with like-minded actors is a topic that is further discussed in Section 2.3.4.

To conclude, institutional actors within IOs are not helpless and passive pawns when their organizations face existential challenges. Instead, as Herbert Kaufman (1976) has noted, 'they are active, energetic, persistent participants ... in the game of politics as it affects their lives' (p. 9). Institutional actors can help their IOs to adapt to demands from powerful member states and the challenge of competing institutions and also help them to resist such pressures. They can do both through behavioural and discursive strategies. As central actors within their IOs, institutional actors have a wide range of options to respond. They have to make, however, careful choices, consider trade-offs when formulating and implementing responses to the existential challenges, and tailor their response to the exact type of challenge posed. Yet while IO institutional actors have potentially a menu of response options, it remains an open question whether institutional actors have the ability to strategically respond and whether all options are available to all IOs. This helps us understand why some institutional actors provide more purposeful responses than others.

2.3 Abilities of IO institutional actors to respond

Institutional actors within IOs therefore have potentially a wide range of different responses they can pursue to existential challenges. They can also potentially tailor their responses to the exact types of existential challenges they are facing. At the same time, not all IO institutional actors have all the same abilities to respond. Their own strengths will therefore likely condition the extent to which they can pursue strategic responses. This section focuses on four key features of institutional actors—their leadership, organizational structure, formal competences, and external networks. It proposes that variation in these features affects the ability of institutional actors to respond to existential challenges. Institutional actors with strong leadership, a unified organizational structure, strong formal competences, and an elaborate external network have more response options and are more likely to develop strategic responses than institutional actors with weaker leadership, a fragmented organizational structure, weak competences, and no external network (Proposition 2, see also Section 2.5). Analysing these key features therefore helps us to understand why some institutional actors provide more purposeful responses than others.

As Chapter 1 of the book has made clear, there is a prerequisite and a scope condition to this theory. First, IOs should face an existential challenge, which

is a prerequisite. Second, IOs should have the ability to potentially respond, which limits the scope of institutional actors to which this theory applies. It is indeed important to note that we consider only IOs that have substantial resources, such as staff and budgets, as without those any strategic response is unlikely (cf. Debre & Dijkstra, 2021a; Gray, 2018). Staff capacity is needed when it comes to formulating responses at the political and strategic level, but staff also plays a key role in facilitating policy-making among the member states, implementation, and press and public relations. If institutional actors therefore are to play a key role in adaptation and resistance by putting forward and implementing reform proposals, sabotaging challenges, insulating and protecting their own organizations, and acting through discursive responses, they clearly need staff. While the book, methodologically, has put the threshold at minimally 250 staff members for its six case studies (focusing on the most-likely IOs to develop responses to existential challenges), the theory outlined here applies to all IOs that have a sufficiently large staff to formulate and implement responses to existential challenges.

Institutional actors thus need a substantial staff to respond to existential challenges, but this is not a sufficient condition. Even with substantial latent resources, Nitsan Chorev (2012, pp. 28–41) reminds us that a strategic response is not a given. Both adaptation and resistance are defined above as intentional responses and are therefore strategic in nature. Strategies involve some sort of a plan to proactively achieve certain objectives. Institutional actors therefore need to think about their own interests and those of their organization and consider the best means to cope with and counter existential challenges. It may well be that the best response is to sit back, but that would be a purposeful choice and differ from institutional actors doing nothing because they cannot do anything. In other words, institutional actors should be able to recognize the existential challenge on time, pick an appropriate strategic response out of a range of options that they have available, and implement the chosen response. This is a tall order since institutional actors, as bureaucracies, can be inert (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004; Bayerlein et al., 2020; Weaver, 2008). It is thus important to further investigate the ability of institutional actors to change their fortunes.

There are many potential variables that affect the agency of institutional actors (e.g. Biermann & Siebenhüner, 2009). Indeed, recent advances in the academic study of international public administration have uncovered a variety of variables from formal powers to bureaucratic styles. As the ambition of this book is to show variation in the ability of institutional actors to respond, we limit ourselves to key explanations that are widely present in the academic literature. We consider the institutional actors themselves, their position within their IOs, and their position outside IOs. We study, in

this regard, four key features of institutional actors. Central to our analysis is leadership, which is needed to recognize existential challenges but also formulate and implement responses. We furthermore focus on the organizational structure of institutional actors, their formal competences within the IO, and their embeddedness in external networks outside the IO. While there are potentially other relevant factors, these four features provide a comprehensive picture of the abilities of institutional actors to respond. They not only logically affect the range of available response options for institutional actors but also their ability to develop strategic responses.

2.3.1 Leadership

Leadership by Secretaries-General, Directors-General, and Executive Secretaries is critical when dealing with existential challenges. Institutional actors need leadership to recognize the effect of existential challenges on the organization, choose and formulate responses, and implement those. IO leaders fulfil, in this respect, multiple roles (Mathiason, 2007). The first is at the political-strategic level when IO leaders recognize existential challenges and develop a strategic response for their organization (see particularly Schroeder, 2014 on IO leaders formulating strategic plans). While many of the existential challenges take the form of 'acute crises', because demands by powerful states or the creation of newly competing IOs attract attention and demand a response by IOs, it is not always immediately clear what the full consequences are as existential challenges unfold over time: Are powerful states serious about their demands or simply bluffing, and will newly created IOs develop into competitors or occupy themselves with other functions? There is a key role for IO leaders at the top of the organization to understand these challenges and make strategic choices.

Leadership is, however, not limited to making strategic choices. IO leaders will, secondly, need to ensure that the institutional actors as a whole follow up with regard to the chosen responses. They therefore need to get their own organization on the same page, which is not automatic. Nina Hall and Ngaire Wood (2018), for instance, show that IO leaders face considerable constraints with their own bureaucracies including legal-political, bureaucratic, and resource constraints. IO leaders have, thirdly, a role in facilitating relations between the member states. Are IO leaders, in this respect, authoritative and do the member states listen to them, or are IO leaders simply ignored? Finally, IO leaders play a key role in external relations both through public communication (Gronau & Schmidtke, 2016, pp. 542–546)

and maintaining relations with like-minded actors outside the IO. Overall, John Mathiason (2007, pp. 76–82) lists several roles for IO leaders, which include the ability to navigate the external environment, such as promoting agreement among states, responding to crises, articulation of vision, public and media relations, but also maintaining relations with the United States as the most powerful member state.

While the literature therefore stresses leadership for institutional actors, it is less clear on what makes for good IO leadership, because it often involves idiosyncratic personal traits. In general, it is worth pointing at three alternative perspectives on the ability of IO leaders to lead. First, IO leaders are empowered and constrained by the job description and the delegated discretion. Some leadership positions within IOs are simply more powerful than similar leadership positions in other IOs. Scholars have, for instance, pointed at Article 99 of the UN Charter, which gives the UN Secretary-General the mandate to 'bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security'. This provision was notably an intentional step up from the League of Nations to give the Secretary-General a more activist role (Myint-U & Scott, 2007, p. 3; Tharoor, 2007, pp. 33–34). Second, from a principal-agent perspective, scholars have also pointed out that states screen and select the IO leaders they want, which often results in a compromise (e.g. Hawkins et al., 2006, pp. 28–29). In other words, states not just determine the formal mandate but also choose the office-holder.

This book, however, third, also points at the personal qualities of IO leaders. Problematic with the two previous perspectives is that the qualities of leaders tend to vary within IOs as much as they vary across IOs. While WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy (2005–2013), for instance, was considered strong, his successor Roberto Azevêdo (2013–2020) resigned before the end of his mandate. There was a similar contrast between World Bank Presidents James Wolfensohn (1995–2005) and Paul Wolfowitz (2005–2007). The same goes for virtually all IOs which have seen stronger and weaker leadership (e.g. Chesterman, 2007; Hendrickson, 2006; Kille & Scully, 2003; Park & Weaver, 2012; Schroeder, 2014). Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009) find that strong leaders, defined as 'charismatic, visionary, and popular, as well as flexible and reflexive' (p. 344)—notably personal characteristics rather than formal roles—correlate with autonomous external influence across nine environmental case studies. Michael Schroeder (2014) lists a bunch of IO leaders who have been particularly influential in organizational change and development, according to the literature, including Mahler and Brundtland (WHO); McNamara (World Bank); Hammarskjöld, Boutros-Ghali, and Annan (UN);

Van Heuven Goedhart (UN Refugee Agency); and Grant (UN Children's Fund).

What drives IO leadership when it comes to existential challenges remains an empirical issue, which will be addressed throughout the book. While IO leaders have certain roles to fulfil and jobs to do, the literature points out many examples where IO leaders have interpreted their own mandates in expansionist terms. Furthermore, when existential challenges hit IOs, as in acute crises, IOs often have to do with the leaders the states screened and selected. Such crises also open up opportunities for leaders and distinguish those that have expertise and authority within their IOs, the networks and informal contacts to take action, and their personal skills and willingness to step up. While IO leadership, like all institutional features studied in this book, will be empirically tested, it is important to consider the personal skill of IO leaders.

Overall, we can expect that the leadership of Secretaries-General, Directors-General, and Executive Secretaries and their private offices affects whether institutional actors are able to (a) formulate a response strategy to existential challenges, (b) provide strategic direction to the organization, (c) facilitate relations between the membership, and (d) engage with like-minded external actors. When institutional actors benefit from clear leadership, they can proactively make choices about strategic responses. They can purposively weigh responses of adaptation against resistance and choose between their behavioural and discursive means. Without leadership, the responses of institutional actors to existential challenges are more likely post hoc and inconsistent, if at all present.

2.3.2 Organizational structure

In addition to leadership, the organizational structure of institutional actors should also be considered when assessing their ability to strategically respond to existential challenges. This concerns the institutional actors and their bureaucracies themselves. When institutional actors can strategically leverage the full weight of their resources (including budgets and staff), they are better able to withstand existential pressures. This is not an automaticity. For institutional actors to craft strategic responses, it matters whether they are integrated bureaucracies with clear reporting lines, treaty secretariats that facilitate specific functions such as organizing the meetings, or fragmented collections of directorates dealing with different tasks. Worst case, institutional actors can consist of uncontrollable subunits, islands of

authority with their own operating procedures and cultures, which compete with other subunits over turf (Allison & Halperin, 1972). Particularly in crisis situations—where responses to existential challenges need to be strategic, coherent, and rapid—fragmentation can be constraining.

Scholars have only recently started to study the structure of international actors. A key question is how authority is organized through institutional actors. This involves whether IO leaders have sufficient control over their institutional actors. In general, scholars have uncovered that IOs are oftentimes 'complex agents' where there are close relationships between member state delegates and secretariat staff (Elsig, 2011). Staff working in institutional actors can therefore be subject to unilateral influence by states rather than strictly following their hierarchies (Urpelainen, 2012). Mareike Kleine (2013) points at 'national fiefdoms' in IOs. Yet even when the institutional actors are insulated from undue meddling by member states, their organizational structure may not facilitate strategic responses to existential challenges. Erin Graham (2014), for instance, examines the fragmentation within the WHO bureaucracy, which she argues helps to explain WHO performance: The 'WHO headquarters in Geneva did not control its regional or country office hinterlands' (p. 367). Bayerlein et al. (2020) furthermore point at internal constraints within the bureaucracy as one key explanation for the roles ('administrative styles') that international actors play.

While bureaucracies may show some inertia and may bring about some turf tensions—even more likely in international bureaucracies with a variety of principles and interests—IOs also have ways of dealing with these limits of organizational structure. Leonard Schütte (2021b), for instance, details how the European Commission set up a high-level taskforce on top of its regular bureaucracy to provide a strong response to Brexit. In their study of institutional actors in global environmental governance, Frank Biermann and Bernd Siebenhüner (2009, pp. 341–342) highlight the need for hierarchical flexibility and structures for institutional learning. They find that it is important that decisions can be taken at the lowest possible level for institutional actors to quickly adapt to challenges. In this respect, they note a marked difference between the more flexible World Bank and secretariat of the Global Environmental Facility and the more rigid and hierarchical International Maritime Organization. International actors can also develop their internal mechanisms for learning, including through evaluation procedures, task-forces, and external reviews (ibid.).

We therefore expect that the organizational structure matters for whether institutional actors can purposefully respond to existential challenges. The organizational structure of institutional actors affects their ability to pursue

a strategic, coherent, and rapid response strategy. What is important is that IO leaders have authority over the institutional actors. A fragmented structure, in which subunits have their own autonomy and are subject to undue influence of member states, is likely to limit purposeful responses due to internal resistance. The organizational structure should, however, also allow for hierarchical flexibility and structures for institutional learning. As long as the IO leadership can formulate an overall strategic response, which is carried out and implemented by the full organization, decision-making can take place at the lower levels among institutional actors. In other words, the organizational structure should allow institutional actors to be responsive to existential challenges.

2.3.3 Formal competences

While organizational structure is about institutional actors themselves, critical is also what they can achieve within the broader IO. The formal competences that institutional actors possess are an important starting point in this regard (e.g. Hooghe et al., 2017). This includes formal competences defined in constitutive documents, but also rules of procedure and other documents. While various scholars have convincingly shown that institutional actors can develop authority beyond formal delegated competences (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004; see also Hurd, 1999; Liese et al., 2021; also Section 2.3.1), formal competences to act within an IO are important for institutional actors when addressing existential challenges. If institutional actors, for instance, have agenda-setting powers, they cannot only put forward proposals for behavioural adaptation but are also more likely expected to spearhead responses to challengers. Not all competences are relevant. Of interest are the opportunities that institutional actors have in the policy-process to pursue their responses, whether they have institutional ways to help the organization adapt to new realities or resist pressures on the IO.

A key area in which institutional actors can have formal competences is agenda-shaping and participation in the decision-making process (e.g. Hooghe et al., 2017; Tallberg, 2003, 2010). Some institutional actors and their bureaucracies are expected to initiate policies and reforms, draft documents and perform decision-making roles, including as formal chairs of the meetings. Formal competences allow institutional actors a degree of agency. Using the case of the EU, for instance, Jonas Tallberg (2003) points out how negotiation chairs can set the agenda, structure it, and exclude items from the agenda. Decision-making among member states furthermore often requires third-party brokerage because in negotiations, states are unlikely to signal

their bottom lines with the potential of negotiation failures. While institutional actors oftentimes perform such functions or are sufficiently close to the formal chairs, which they assist (Beach, 2004), in other IOs policy-making is entirely driven by member states. When it comes to existential challenges, however, it is not just important that institutional actors have such powers in terms of formal competences, but that they are recognized as having a certain function. If institutional actors normally provide input for the agenda, expertise on policy, and brokerage during negotiations, they may also be expected to lead on these points in response to existential challenges.

Institutional actors can therefore play an important role at the heart of policy-making, but they also often have a crucial role in policy implementation and external representation. Especially, the discretion that institutional actors have been delegated in implementation (e.g. Hawkins et al., 2006; Pollack, 2003) can be used to facilitate adaptation to existential challenges but also to put up resistance to maintain the status quo. The textbook bureaucratic strategy, after all, is to implement policies differently than intended by the political principals. When institutional actors thus have formal implementation powers, as opposed to implementation by the member states themselves, they will have a greater ability to pursue responses. Similarly, the formal role that institutional actors have in external public engagement and communication is also important. If they have been delegated formal representative roles, it is more natural for them to publicly engage.

Formal competences are therefore about the powers that institutional actors have within IOs, but also about the roles and functions they are expected to play. The formal competences of institutional actors affect their ability to (a) put forward adaptation proposals, (b) facilitate compromise among the membership, (c) affect policy implementation, and (d) engage in public relations and representation. If institutional actors have been formally delegated a role in policy-making, they are more likely to be able to proactively engage in pursuing responses to existential challenges. If institutional actors, however, have much more limited competences, we expect that they will develop responses much less actively or no strategy at all since they have not been given the authority to respond for the IO.

2.3.4 External networks

Finally, the embeddedness of institutional actors in external networks may also affect their ability to mobilize support in the environment surrounding IOs. Institutional actors rarely have sufficient authority of their own to take on major member states (Dijkstra, 2017). By enlisting a range of like-minded

actors beyond the immediate walls of their organizations and orchestrating them into action (Abbott et al., 2015), institutional actors can better pursue their adaptation or resistance responses to existential challenges. The boundaries of IOs—between internal and external actors—are, however, not always clear as many actors surround IOs. We focus here on mobilizing support from actors outside the context of the plenary meetings and executive bodies of IOs. Because of their central position within IOs, institutional actors are often the main contact point for such external actors. They can use these contacts and indeed their external network in support of their responses.

There are three sorts of like-minded actors in the environment of IOs that institutional actors may rely on. First, institutional actors can avail the help of other (major) states which can be coopted into a united front. This goes beyond regular policy-making in committees within IOs. Hylke Dijkstra (2017), for instance, notes that states rarely agree amongst themselves and may therefore team up and 'collude' with institutional actors to pursue common agendas. The ability of institutional actors to enlist other key member states in putting forward a collective response is therefore important. The question here is whether institutional actors can go beyond regular bureaucratic channels and whether IO leaders, for instance, can also reach out to ministers and heads of state and government. Second, in addition to developing relations with like-minded governmental actors, institutional actors can also work with domestic sub-state actors to create domestic opposition and limit the consequences of existential challenges. Some IOs and their institutional actors are embedded, in this respect, in strong transnational networks that also include parliamentarians, experts, and think tanks, as well as regional and local representatives. Climate change and security and defence come to mind as areas where strong transnational networks, if not epistemic communities, exist that support international cooperation.

Third, institutional actors can make use of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which increasingly have access to IOs (Sending & Neumann, 2006; Tallberg et al., 2013). NGOs can be powerful allies for institutional actors, not just because of their abilities and channels to lobby the member states but also their strong discursive contribution to public debates. It is therefore not surprising that the academic literature finds many examples of how institutional actors successfully collude, orchestrate, and build coalitions with NGOs (Abbott et al., 2015; Hale & Roger, 2014; Hickmann & Elsässer, 2020).

The embeddedness in external networks by institutional actors affects their ability to enlist support from like-minded actors. However, not all IOs and

their institutional actors have an equal degree of permeability (Hawkins & Jacoby, 2008) and preexisting networks with external actors. There is indeed considerable variation in the openness of IOs (Jönsson & Tallberg, 2010; Tallberg et al., 2013) and it is reasonable to assume that for IOs that are relatively open, institutional actors are in a better position to develop external networks. It is therefore important to uncover the embeddedness and the external networks institutional actors possess to understand their ability to mobilize support in response to existential challenges. We expect that institutional actors with a strong external network will focus on building a coalition in the surroundings of the IO, whereas IOs lacking a network will be more constrained and circumspect in their responses.

2.3.5 Conclusion

This book seeks the answer to the question why the institutional actors of IOs differently cope with and counter existential challenges. It argues that institutional actors do not all have the same abilities to respond. It has thus proposed to focus on four key features of institutional actors—leadership, organizational structure, formal competences, and external networks—and it expects that variation in these features affects the ability of institutional actors to respond to existential challenges, particularly when they seek to tailor them to different types of existential challenges. While there are potentially many factors that affect responses by the institutional actors, these features capture the institutional actors themselves, their position within their IOs, and their position outside IOs. They thus provide a comprehensive picture of the abilities of institutional actors to respond. They affect the range of available response options and the ability of institutional actors to develop strategic responses. In this book, we expect that institutional actors with strong leadership, a unified organizational structure, strong formal competences, and an elaborate external network have more response options and are more likely to develop purposeful responses than institutional actors with weaker leadership, a fragmented organizational structure, weak competences, and no external network (Proposition 2, see Section 2.5).

At the same time, it is not necessarily a priori clear from the theoretical literature whether institutional actors need all four, how these four features interact, and precisely how they relate to specific responses. In the theoretical argument, we have prioritized IO leadership, which is necessary to identify existential challenges and formulate and implement a 'strategic plan' (e.g. Schroeder, 2014) for organizational adaptation or resistance. Yet, leadership

also requires support throughout the organizational structure, formal competences within the IO to propose or block agenda items, and an external network that can be mobilized in support of the IO. Throughout the case studies of various existential challenges facing IOs in the remainder of the book, we will therefore empirically try to establish whether these features indeed mattered for the institutional actors. Did stronger leadership in one IO provide a more strategic response than in another IO? Did the organizational structure facilitate or obstruct a purposeful response? Did institutional actors with strong formal competences also provide strong responses? And did institutional actors engage differently with the external actors in the surroundings of IOs? The purpose of the book is, in this respect, to highlight the great variation in institutional responses to existential challenges and to show that institutional actors are differently composed in this respect.

2.4 Outcomes for IOs

When IOs are faced with existential challenges due to challenges by powerful member states or competing institutions, there are several different potential outcomes. First, since existential challenges put the survival or at least some of the core functions of IOs at risk, one outcome for IOs is decline or dissolution. Part of the IO bodies may become inoperable or IOs may no longer be able to fully carry out their mandates. Second, IOs may adapt as a result of challenges by powerful member states and competing IOs. This implies that their institutions or mandates will look different at the end of the process. Finally, IOs may maintain the status quo and thus stay the same. The final section of this theoretical chapter will outline these three potential outcomes for IOs. It will also argue that the responses by institutional actors, conditioned by their abilities, are likely consequential for these outcomes, even if it is not always possible to causally link responses by institutional actors to outcomes due to many contingent factors.

Because existential challenges put individual IOs at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out some of their core functions, it is important to start with the worst-case scenario for IOs: *decline and dissolution*. The dissolution of IOs, or when they fall into desuetude, presents the end of their lifecycle (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2020). Some 218 out of 561 IOs (39%) created since 1815 are no longer around. This implies that either IOs have been formally dissolved or, in case of desuetude, they no longer have three or more member states, a regular plenary meeting or a working secretariat and correspondence address (Pevehouse et al., 2020). About half of these IOs have

'died' while the other half have been replaced or merged with other IOs (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2020). While the death of major IOs with substantial staff resources (a scope condition of this book) remains rather rare (see Debre & Dijkstra, 2021a; Dijkstra & Debre, 2022; Dijkstra, Debre, & Heinkelmann-Wild, 2024), dissolution and desuetude are potential outcomes of existential challenges and should not be a priori disregarded.

While dissolution means that IOs no longer really exist, Julia Gray (2018) has also shown that a large number of IOs are actually 'zombies'—38% of international economic organizations in her dataset. Such IOs continue to operate, for instance by organizing regular plenary meetings, but without any progress towards their mandates. While the zombie metric—the absence of economic activity among member states in an IO—works well for international economic organizations, the category itself is helpful in understanding IOs below the threshold of dissolution. Clearly, there are many IOs around that produce very little and have little impact on their environments. States might simply keep them around. As such another outcome of existential challenges may be that IOs fall into a zombie state. Alternatively, we may see that IOs, even if they still produce output, become less central to international relations. This is equally an instance of IO decline (Debre & Dijkstra, 2023).

While dissolution, desuetude, and the zombie state are adverse outcomes that affect the full IO, IOs may also be at risk of no longer being able to carry out *some* of their core functions. In other words, a potential outcome of an existential challenge may also be that only part of the IO declines or stops operating. This is particularly relevant for general-purpose IOs (Hooghe, Lenz, & Marks, 2019), such as the EU or UN, which carry out many different functions. It may well be that part of the organization underperforms, that states challenge the organization, and that they ultimately take away a specific part of the mandate.[2] This outcome is, however, not limited to general-purpose IOs. As Chapter 3 will, for instance, show, the WTO Appellate Body became inoperable but the WTO continued to operate. An important outcome is therefore that some of the core functions of IOs are targeted.

Existential challenges can, by definition, potentially have adverse effects on IOs, but they may also result in an outcome of *institutional and policy change*. As noted above, adaptation is a response of IOs to existential challenges and involves both governance structures and policies. This means that existential challenges may result in an outcome where the institutions of IOs are reformed or where new institutions and bodies have been added to an

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[2] Because general-purpose IOs are often driven by communities, deal with many policy areas, and can link issues and internal shift priorities, this empirical book studies instead task-specific IO (see Chapter 1).

IO. This is a possible outcome, for instance, when powerful member states demand more representation, a fairer institutional balance, or are dissatisfied with the IO performance. It may also be that IOs have changed the scope of their actions, for instance by adding new policy areas or actually limiting their mandate. Particularly in the case of challenges by competing IOs, one outcome for IOs may be to renegotiate their division of labour and activities. Policy change may also come through adopting different types of policies or adding new objectives, for instance by mainstreaming climate action goals or other sustainability development goals throughout the operations of the IO.

This chapter has furthermore focused on the purposeful resistance by IOs and their institutional actors to existential challenges with the aim of *maintaining the status quo*. This involves the intentional actions to keep things as they are. This can be the status quo in terms of institutions but also policies. IOs may resist erosions of their authority through the establishment of more oversight mechanisms or recontacting. They may resist taking on new tasks outside their core mandates or pursue the policy ambitions of individual member states. An outcome of existential challenges may be simply the status quo. It may be that the existential challenges by powerful member states or newly established competing IOs backfire or that these existential challenges are insufficiently sustained. A change in domestic politics, for instance, the election of a new U.S. President, may inaugurate the end of the challenge. Newly established competing IOs may also have a hard time taking off. They may themselves not get sufficient support from their membership to actually compete over a period of time. One outcome of these existential challenges, particularly when IOs keep their heads down (see e.g. Hirschmann, 2021), may therefore well be the status quo.

This chapter—and also this book—has provided a three-step logic in which (1) IOs face an existential challenge by powerful member states or competing institutions, (2) resulting in strategic responses by institutional actors within IOs if they possess certain features, (3) leading to certain outcomes for these IOs. It is therefore tempting to link strategic responses by institutional actors directly to outcomes for IOs: If institutional actors do A, B, and C, this leads to outcome Y. It is important, however, to caution against this. Despite their centrality to IOs, institutional actors are ultimately not omnipotent. They can provide strong strategic responses but it may ultimately not be sufficient to keep their organizations alive. Officials of the League of Nations, for instance, kept their organization running during the Second World War and wrote, as late as 1944, a report 'to counteract the declining image of the League of Nations' (Auberer, 2016, p. 393), but it ultimately was to no avail. Furthermore, as this chapter has argued, institutional actors often use responses that

also rely on other actors, whether like-minded actors in the environments of the IOs or domestic audiences of discursive responses. This makes it difficult to establish direct causality. As the case studies of this book in the next chapters will also show, there are indeed contingent factors that also affect the outcomes for the IOs under existential challenges.

At the same time, when carefully tracing IO responses to existential challenges and considering all the counterfactual evidence, it is often possible to make plausible claims about the influence that institutional actors had in the eventual outcomes for their organizations. It is also often quite straightforward to identify instances in which institutional actors did not respond and why they were constrained when facing existential challenges. The key focus of the book is therefore to explain why the institutional actors differently cope with and counter existential challenges and to explain variation in their responses. The empirical chapters will nevertheless also briefly discuss the outcomes of existential challenges and consider whether these can be reasonably linked to the responses of the institutional actors.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the conceptual and theoretical basis for the book. It has developed an institutional theory on the survival of IOs in order to answer the research question of why do the institutional actors of IOs differently respond to existential challenges? It has argued that while a variety of existential challenges put the survival or at least some of the core functions of IOs at risk, IOs are not without options to respond. They can adapt to existential challenges or try to resist them. Institutional actors within IOs play a key role in this respect. They have a strong interest in the survival and well-being of their organizations. At the same time, strategic responses by institutional actors are not a given. Institutional actors are often heavily constrained. They do not just need latent resources such as staff and budgets. In order to formulate and implement strategic responses tailored to the different types of existential challenges, this chapter has argued, they also need leadership, an integrated organizational structure, strong formal competences, and an external network. If institutional actors possess these features, they are in a better position to pursue purposeful responses to existential challenges.

It is worth to explicitly formulate the theoretical expectations of this chapter in two propositions. First, this chapter has argued that while IOs may face a variety of existential challenges, two different types are particularly important as they affect IOs specifically: the direct existential challenges

by powerful states and the indirect existential challenges where (groups of) states establish competing institutions. We have noted in this chapter that IOs and their institutional actors are likely to respond differently to both types of challenges. It will be difficult for IO actors to accommodate and adapt to direct challenges by powerful states due to the presence of an accommodation dilemma, which risks a race to the bottom and eroding core IO mandates. On the other hand, it is likely counterproductive for IOs to strategically resist the creation of new institutions and openly compete, as states dissatisfied with incumbent IOs may well further divest and take their business to the new institutions. We therefore expect that institutional actors will tailor their responses depending on the exact institutional challenges.

Proposition 1 *IO institutional actors are more likely to (behaviourally or discursively) resist direct existential challenges by powerful states. They are more likely to adapt to indirect existential challenges through new competing institutions.*

Second, the extent to which IO institutional actors can strategically respond, however, likely depends on their institutional features. Some institutional actors have stronger institutional features than others and this conditions their ability to proactively pursue strategic responses. This chapter has made clear that IO leadership is an important institutional feature. IOs with stronger leaders are in a better position to recognize existential challenges and develop strategic responses. The chapter has furthermore identified three additional features. It is important that institutional actors have a clear organizational structure in which they can leverage and use their bureaucratic resources in response to existential challenges. We also expect that IOs with clear formal competences are in a better position to proactively respond simply because institutional actors will have powers and instruments. Finally, the embeddedness in external networks and the ability of IO institutional actors to mobilize these networks will be an important aspect of the strategic responses to existential challenges.

Proposition 2 *The ability of IO institutional actors to pursue strategic responses will depend on their leadership, organizational structure, formal competences, and external networks.*

The remaining chapters of this book will test this argument empirically. The book uses, in this respect, comparative case studies. Across three policy fields, it studies six IOs that have faced serious existential challenges of which the outcomes were not predetermined. In Chapter 3, the book provides evidence

from the area of trade and development with a focus on the challenge of the United States to the WTO Appellate Body and the establishment of the rival AIIB to the World Bank. In Chapter 4, for the area of climate and energy, the focus is on the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement and the creation of IRENA as a competitor to the IEA in order to address renewable energy. In Chapter 5, for security and defence, the book focuses on the challenges of Donald Trump to NATO and its defence commitment and how the creation of EU security policy affected the incumbent OSCE. Throughout these chapters, the book thus studies a direct existential challenge by the United States as a powerful member state and an indirect existential challenge through the creation of a competing institution.

For each case study, we engage in process-tracing by chronologically studying the process from the beginning until the end. We describe the existential challenge, discuss in detail the response by the institutional actors, consider the type of response, and explain variation in the responses on the basis of the variables identified in this chapter. Finally, we briefly discuss the outcome of the existential challenge. The empirical ambition of the case studies is not necessarily to link the responses by IOs to eventual outcomes. Nevertheless, through the case comparison, we can come to reasonable conclusions about whether responses by institutional actors mattered for outcomes in IOs. Throughout the case studies, the book combines publicly available data from official documents, newspaper articles, policy reports, and secondary sources with data from 114 interviews conducted with IO officials and experts. In the concluding Chapter 6, the empirical results of the case studies are compared.

3
Trade and Development

IOs are regularly challenged in ways that put them at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out some of their core functions or sustain their dominance and relevance within their policy arenas. Chapter 2 presented the argument of this book, namely that institutional actors within IOs may potentially play a proactive role in responding to such existential challenges. More specifically, institutional actors can help push their organizations towards adapting or resisting to existential challenges and ensure their continuity. Whatever response they choose is dependent on the type of challenge they face and their own institutional features. Leadership is particularly important, as institutional actors within IOs need to recognize existential challenges on time. Furthermore, Chapter 2 proposed that strategic responses by institutional actors are likely in the case of a clear organizational structure, strong formal competences, and embeddedness in external networks. This chapter is the first of the three case study chapters examining the empirical validity of the argument. The focus is on IOs in the policy area of international trade and development, and the chapter zooms in on two existential challenges experienced by, respectively, the WTO and the World Bank.

The chapter begins by analysing the case study of the Trump administration's contestation of the WTO Appellate Body, which is arguably one of the most telling examples of the crisis of the liberal international order (Lake et al., 2021). It was an instance of a direct challenge by a powerful state potentially putting a core function (adjudication) of the WTO and the international trade regime at risk. Several U.S. administrations had previously voiced their criticism at the Appellate Body, claiming that its members engaged in unsolicited judicial overreach, violated procedural rules, and deviated from the WTO agreements (U.S. Senate, 2000; USTR, 2018, 2020). Yet the Trump administration took this contestation to a new level creating an existential challenge to the WTO. Through a consistent blockade of the (re)appointment process of all Appellate Body members, with the clear intent of reducing the authority of the WTO in trade, the Trump administration effectively rendered the Body dysfunctional by December 2019. This

first case study identifies the lack of an effective and serious response by WTO institutional actors to this existential challenge by a powerful state as key to understanding the outcome.

Focusing on the WTO and its institutional actors, the chapter illustrates how the WTO lacked political leadership to give direction for an effective response and how the organization was hampered by its fragmented organizational structure. More specifically, the findings reveal how the authority of the organization's Secretariat and Director-General is much constrained by the institutional design and culture of the organization. The strict institutional rules and norms of the WTO greatly restrict the ability of the institution's leadership to proactively engage with relevant actors within and outside the organization, set agendas, build coalitions of supporters, and intervene in the workings of the organization. Thus, as the U.S.-led challenge began to manifest, the institution's leadership (represented by the Secretariat and headed by the Director-General) was unable to effectively pursue any adaptive or resistive strategies. The first case study of this book, on the assault against the WTO Appellate Body, thus provides weak evidence for the argument that institutional actors can be purposeful and proactive actors in IOs when existentially challenged, even if it highlights the institutional limits of the WTO.

Yet these findings on the WTO contrast with the second case study in this chapter: The response of the World Bank institutional actors to the challenge posed by the China-led creation of a potentially alternative multilateral development banking framework as reflected by the AIIB. This second case study illustrates the proactive and effective role played by the World Bank's leadership in pushing an adaptive response. This was achieved thanks to the broad institutional authority, competences, and resources available to the World Bank's leadership.

The plan for the establishment of the AIIB was initially announced by President Xi Jinping in October 2013 (*The Economist,* 2013). It followed the 2013 BRICS Durban Declaration, which, in the wake of the economic and financial crisis, had been critical of the Western-created Bretton Woods institutions. As such, the AIIB was not just an indirect challenge to incumbent development banks by a powerful state but also potentially presented a different vision for global order backed up by a coalition of emerging powers. For the World Bank, in particular, this presented an existential challenge. Not just to its infrastructure lending portfolio but also to its model of development lending based on international norms, such as accountability, sustainable economic growth, and good governance. Yet contrary to the case of the WTO

Appellate Body, where institutional actors stood by as the existential challenge played out, the World Bank, under the leadership of President Jim Yong Kim and with the support of his cabinet officials and bureaucracy, proactively engaged with the potential challenge and formulated relevant solutions.

The response of these institutional actors came on the back of internal reforms at the World Bank aimed at improving its knowledge-production capabilities, increasing its bureaucratic efficiency, and retaining its premier status as the norm-setting institution within the global lending arena. The internal reforms also brought changes to the shareholding system, addressing key grievances by China (regarding its voice within the institution) and the United States (regarding China's borrowing limits). The World Bank's leadership effectively employed its broad institutional powers and strategically used available opportunity structures to initiate constructive engagements in relation to the AIIB from early on. These included inter-institutional exchanges and partnerships through co-financing agreements. Together, these initiatives not only focused on strategically moulding the rising new institution, strengthening the impetus for it to follow suit with the normative framework and operational standards of the World Bank, but also aimed at ascertaining the future relevance of the extant institution within the development lending arena.

When taking both case studies together, this chapter provides a first insight into the factors that may explain variation in IO institutional actors' responses to existential challenges, and the different ways in which both the type of challenge and the institutional design of the IOs under study affect that response. Even where IO institutional actors possess necessary latent resources (i.e. a sizeable secretariat), their ability to pull their weight and proactively address existential challenges ultimately rests on institutional factors. This is illustrated by the case of the WTO, where its large and expertise-heavyweight Secretariat did not guarantee an effective response strategy, hampered by a lack of leadership and a fragmented organizational structure. In contrast, the response by the World Bank's institutional actors was markedly different. Thanks to its strong leadership, extensive formal authority, and a proactive engagement with the challenge, the World Bank leadership pursued an effective strategy ensuring adaptation to the establishment and rise of the AIIB. What both cases also make clear is that the type of existential challenge may affect the response chosen. While the WTO actors barely provided a strategic response, they were also struck in an accommodation dilemma that prevented them from being responsive to demands

from the Trump administration. They simply hoped to maintain the status quo. The World Bank, on the other hand, proactively adopted a strategy of adaptation to adjust to a new situation with a challenger AIIB.

While there is congruence between the response pushed by institutional actors and the resulting outcome of a challenge, the focus in this chapter is only on identifying the response strategies pushed by IOs and highlighting the role of leading institutional actors and their bureaucracies in that process. As such, establishing the causal link between the responses and the outcomes of challenges is not within the ambition of this chapter. In contrast, the goal is to analyse the conditions that help explain those responses and shape the ability of the relevant internal actors to formulate and implement their responses. The next sections discuss the WTO and World Bank case studies. The sections begin first by introducing the respective IOs and their main functions, before turning to the specific existential challenges under study. The sections then examine the institutional responses pushed by the IOs and conclude with the outcomes of the episode and offer a recap of the findings.

3.1 WTO and the Appellate Body crisis

3.1.1 The WTO and its main functions

The WTO was established on 1 January 1995 by 123 states that agreed, following the 1994 Marrakesh Agreement (within the Uruguay Round of negotiations), to replace the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Today, the WTO's membership counts 164 states, which together represent more than 90% of the total volume of global trade (WTO, 2022). The key functions of the WTO are to facilitate trade in goods, services, and intellectual property among its members, provide a framework and platform through which negotiations for future trade agreements can take place, reduce (and ultimately eliminate) tariffs, quotas, and other restrictions on global trade, and provide a dispute-settlement framework for trade-related issues. As such, the WTO is a task-specific organization. A total of 625 staff are employed by the organization, and the total budget is around 160 million Swiss francs (based on membership contributions) (WTO, 2022).

The highest authority within the WTO is placed at the level of the Ministerial Conference, where member state representatives meet (at least) every

two years. However, the daily work at the WTO is essentially handled by the following bodies: the Secretariat, the General Council, the Trade Policy Review Body, and the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB). The WTO Secretariat, headed by a Director-General, oversees the operations of various advisory and administrative divisions (each headed by a deputy Director-General). The prescribed role of the Director-General (who is appointed for a four-year term) is managerial in nature, focused on the supervision and monitoring of the administrative processes of the organization (Buterbaugh & Fulton, 2007; Xu & Weller, 2008). The current Director-General is Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who took over the office from Roberto Carvalho de Azevêdo in March 2021. Azevêdo headed the WTO Secretariat during the Trump presidency, and himself took over the office from Pascal Lamy in September 2013.

The General Council, which includes subdivisions focusing on specific aspects of the WTO's functions, includes: the Council for Trade in Goods, the Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), the Council for Trade in Services, and the Trade Negotiations Committee (which deals with ongoing rounds of trade negotiations and is chaired by the WTO's Director-General). The General Council meets also at the Trade Policy Review Body and the DSB. The function of the former is to conduct trade policy reviews of members and to consider the reports on trade policy development presented by the Director-General. The function of the latter is to deal with disputes between WTO members, establish dispute settlement panels, refer matters to arbitration, adopt panel and arbitration reports, monitor the implementation of rulings, and authorize suspension of concessions for members that fail to comply with such rulings (Bohne, 2010; Buterbaugh & Fulton, 2007; Steger, 2009; WTO, 1994).

A key permanent component of the DSB is the Appellate Body. The Appellate Body consists of seven members appointed for four years (renewable once) by member states. The Appellate Body possesses its own secretariat, with staff specialized in international trade law and arbitration, within the broader WTO Secretariat. The primary task of the Appellate Body is to hear the appeals of decisions made by the dispute settlement panels of the WTO, which are binding unless overturned through consensus by all members. As such, the WTO Appellate Body functions essentially as an international adjudicative organ that is crucial to the WTO's dispute settlement system and the global trade arena for that matter (Buterbaugh & Fulton, 2007; Elsig, 2011; Hopewell, 2021a; Howse, 2021; Zaccaria, 2022).

3.1.2 The Trump administration and the WTO Appellate Body

This chapter focuses on the existential challenge posed by the U.S. contestation of the WTO Appellate Body. This conforms with the first type of challenges described in the theoretical framework of the previous chapter, namely a direct existential challenge by a powerful member state within an IO. The following paragraphs briefly describe the nature, causes, and manifestations of the challenge, and lay down the logic as to why it can be identified as existential in its consequences for the WTO.

As Chapter 2 explained, the support of powerful states is crucial to the effective functioning of IOs, not only given their central role as supporters of the institutional framework behind the liberal international order but also due to their importance in terms of their support and demands to the operations of such IOs. As such, changes in the relations between powerful states and IOs can have existential consequences for such organizations, as they may reduce the degree of support that powerful states show towards IOs while increasing simultaneously the demands posed on the organization. This could lead to a situation where a powerful state, such as the United States, begins to view unfavourably cooperation through an IO, such as the WTO, thus engaging in direct contestation that could threaten the proper functioning of an IO's core functions as well as its long-term vitality and existence.

The case of the U.S. challenge against the WTO Appellate Body fits neatly within that logical framework. On the one hand, the United States has had issues with the performance of the WTO for some time. It has consistently claimed that the organization is gridlocked and ineffective for attaining further progress in trade negotiations, stalled since the Doha Development Round. The United States has also, for more than a decade, voiced criticisms against the operations of the Appellate Body, accusing it of engaging in activism and deviating from the agreed-upon rules of the organization (Bown & Keynes, 2020; U.S. Mission Geneva, 2019; USTR, 2020). Moreover, the United States has been critical of the WTO's alleged failure at changing the country categorization of China, arguing that the current categorization of China as a developing country inhibits fair terms in trade relations between the two countries under the umbrella of the WTO.

Apart from this critique on WTO performance, the Trump administration took a clear turn towards unilateralism and bilateralism ('America First') at the expense of multilateralism and the institutions that sustain the multilateral order. It made no secret of its animosity towards the WTO, which it

translated into decreased demand for multilateral trade and a prioritization of strategic bilateral agreements. Therefore, the wider patterns of animosity between the United States and the WTO reflect how the sources of existential challenges come from different directions. While the Trump administration certainly increased the U.S. challenge towards the WTO, both in actions and rhetoric, the subsequent Biden administration did not display any interest in rapprochement with the WTO. As such, the causes of the challenge appear to go beyond the singular U.S. experience with the Trump administration, rather reflecting more complex grievances towards the organization.

Because dissatisfaction with the WTO and its Appellate Body was a longer standing concern across U.S. Presidencies, it is important to discuss the modalities of U.S. contestation and how it escalated to an existential challenge under the Trump administration. In terms of the manifestation of the challenge, in the early stages, the United States exclusively relied on rhetorical tools for expressing its grievances against the WTO Appellate Body. These public charges centred around the Appellate Body's alleged violations of procedural rules, consistent delays, and increasingly extensive reliance with precedence as a tool for producing its final rulings (Kucik & Puig, 2021; U.S. Senate, 2000; USTR, 2018, 2020). The Obama administration ramped up the rhetoric and began also employing behavioural strategies, namely by blocking specific Appellate Body members. To understand how that tactic worked, it is first necessary to get an overview of the appointment process of Appellate Body members.

At the Appellate Body, the appointment process involves WTO members nominating candidates, which are then vetted by the DSB and a selection committee (which includes, amongst others, the Director-General as well as chairpersons of WTO Councils). Following the selection process, Appellate Body members are appointed through positive consensus, which essentially provides all WTO members with the power to veto (Dunoff & Pollack, 2017; Howse, 2021). As part of the selection and vetting process, candidates may engage in substantive trade law and policy discussions with national delegations and WTO ambassadors in Geneva and sometimes are even interviewed in the capitals of important members (Dunoff & Pollack, 2017; Howse, 2021). Given the positive consensus rule, the selection committee may also engage with WTO members to assess the level of support for candidates before bringing them forward.

The process behind the selection of Appellate Body members, and particularly the positive consensus rule, provide members with much leeway in influencing the appointments at the Appellate Body. As part of its ramped-up behavioural contestation of the Appellate Body, the Obama administration

began screening and blocking the (re)appointment of *specific* members at the Appellate Body (Howse, 2021), particularly those it regarded as potentially playing a role in the deviation of the Appellate Body from the rules of the Dispute Settlement Understanding. For example, in May 2016, the United States made it clear that it would block the consensus for the reappointment of Seung Wha Chang to the Appellate Body (Dunoff & Pollack, 2017). It relied on that opportunity structure to express discontent and send a clear message of contestation to the Appellate Body members and the WTO members. Its nomination strategies, however, appear to have been aimed at shaping the endogenous preferences of the Body (Elsig & Pollack, 2014) rather than causing complete dysfunctionality. Its tactics targeted individual candidates (and sitting members seeking reappointment) rather than the entirety of the Appellate Body. As such, the intensified political discord manifested in appointment practices remained within the contours of the Appellate Body and did not threaten its continuity and operational integrity, or those of the wider institution, thus falling short of what would constitute an existential challenge.

The Trump administration took this contestation to a new level. Rhetorically, the United States essentially went as far as calling the entire Appellate Body 'broken' and even expressed its consideration for leaving the WTO altogether (Amaro, 2020). On the behavioural side, in mid-2017, the United States under the Trump administration effectively began a process that rendered the Appellate Body itself dysfunctional (Hopewell, 2021b). This was achieved by persistently and indiscriminately blocking the (re)appointment process *for all the members* (regardless of their views and track record) while the terms of sitting members expired (Bown & Keynes, 2020; Hopewell, 2021a, p. 1033). Interestingly, this tactic was not very different from that employed by the Republican Party within the domestic context of the United States, where a Republican-held U.S. Senate blocked all nominees for the Supreme Court and many other Federal Courts during the second term of the Obama administration.

U.S. Trade Representatives (USTR) at the time consistently illustrated the reasoning behind this policy. Former USTRs Carla Hills and Susan Schwab both made direct reference to the claim that the Appellate Body had engaged in overreach. Hills noted that 'when the appellate body begins to move around in the factual area or to decide on rules that haven't been agreed to, that could be called and no one disagrees, I think, overreach' (as cited in CSIS, 2018). Schwab noted 'there's been overreach by the appellate body.…you've got an appellate body [sic] that's trying to extrapolate, that has no business extrapolating' (as cited in CSIS, 2018). In 2019, former USTR Robert

Lighthizer explained (on the issue of zeroing, an important point of contention for the United States) that 'where the Appellate Body's reasoning is erroneous and unpersuasive, a WTO panel has an obligation not to follow such flawed reasoning' (USTR, 2019). At the WTO General Council meeting in July 2019, former U.S. ambassador to the WTO, Dennis Shea, emphasized the view that 'the Appellate Body has felt free to depart from what members agreed to' and suggested that proposals by other members aimed at securing consensus and resuming the appointment process at the Appellate Body would not have U.S. support (U.S. Mission Geneva, 2019).

At the same time, the United States continued to produce reports highlighting its concerns while adamantly refusing to collaborate on proposals by other members for reforming the Appellate Body and heed calls to unblock the appointment process (Hopewell, 2021a; USTR, 2018, 2020). Importantly, the Trump administration also took advantage of the inability of the Appellate Body to function properly by appealing into the void several rulings that were produced against its trade practices (Hopewell, 2021a). These actions were significant as they showcased how dysfunctionality at the Body had the potential to threaten the compliance of members. These strategies clearly went beyond those of previous U.S. administrations, which seemed more interested in influencing the nomination process of individual candidates in a bid to shape the endogenous preference of the Appellate Body.

The Trump administration therefore escalated contestation of the appointment process of WTO Appellate Body judges to an existential challenge for the WTO. Adjudication is a core function of the WTO, and the Appellate Body has a central role to play in this respect. By persistently and indiscriminately blocking all appointments, the Trump administration clearly intended to undermine the WTO settlement mechanism. The net result of the Trump administration's contestation was indeed that, by December 2019, the Appellate Body lacked the required minimum number of three members for it to form a panel for disputes. As of December 2020, all seven of the Appellate Body's seats have been vacant. As such, the WTO Appellate Body has effectively become dysfunctional after over two decades of operating within the institutional framework of the WTO.

3.1.3 WTO's institutional response to the Appellate Body crisis

The Trump administration's policies clearly illustrated how, after decades of relative compliance with the WTO, the United States was no longer the key

supporting actor of its multilateral cooperation framework on trade issues. The Trump administration also made it clear that the United States would be prioritizing alternative mechanisms for pursuing its trade interests outside of the WTO given its failure to deliver on its goals (Bown & Keynes, 2020). Within this turning-away process, the Appellate Body became increasingly the main target of the United States' grievances and, as a result, the WTO faced an existential challenge.

Beginning early in its term, the Trump administration noted that it intended to block the Appellate Body from having the necessary number of members, with the prospect of effectively rendering the Appellate Body inoperable by the end of 2019. While previous administrations had set a precedent for U.S. blockage of the (re)appointment process of specific Appellate Body members, under the Trump administration this tactic was upgraded to the blockage of the entire court. What this meant was that, while the WTO as an institution would have continued to exist, it would suffer the loss of a core component. As such, the refusal of the Trump administration to appoint any members to the WTO Appellate Body presented a direct existential challenge by a powerful member state to the WTO, as it put the WTO at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out core dispute settlement functions.

The question of interest in this book therefore is how WTO institutional actors responded to this direct existential challenge (see Table 3.1 for an overview of findings). The answer is that they did very little. The WTO's leadership did not respond to this challenge, with no reforms, decisions, or even public announcements having been made to support the institution throughout that process. This first case study shows how particularly a lack of *leadership* contributed to the failure of the WTO institutional actors at devising and implementing an effective response. The case study highlights furthermore that the decentralized *organizational structure* of the WTO, where the Appellate Body is kept at arm's length from the WTO political organs including the Secretariat, constrained the ability of institutional actors to respond. Particularly, in comparison to some of the other case studies in the book, we also find that the limited *competences* of the WTO institutional actors, and particularly the norm of impartiality of the Director-General, did not help. Institutional actors could furthermore not benefit from much outside support through an *external network*.

When the Trump challenge began to surface, the WTO was led by Director-General Roberto Azevêdo (2013–2020). Azevêdo did surprisingly little to address the U.S. contestation on the Appellate Body, despite the clearly existential nature of that threat. While the position of the WTO

Table 3.1 Overview of empirical findings on WTO and World Bank

	WTO	World Bank
Existential challenge	Trump administration blocks the (re)appointment of all members to the WTO Appellate Body	Establishment of the AIIB seen as potentially spearheading wider impetus for revisionism in the development lending arena
Institutional actors		
Leadership	The Director-General was a career diplomat. Neutral, hands-off leadership style. Supported by experts and highly trained staff at the WTO Secretariat	The President was an outsider with a background in global health and the WHO. Assertive, hands-on leadership style. Supported by a large management team with strong roles, experts, and highly trained staff
Organizational structure	Supportive secretariat for the Councils. High autonomy for the Appellate Body and its secretariat within the WTO Secretariat	Vertical hierarchical bureaucratic structure, with President and senior management at the top of the bureaucratic machinery
Formal competences	Limited range of competences. Facilitating decision-making and mediation roles	Central institutional role. Wide range of competences for external and internal engagements. Public image of the institution
External networks	Limited support in the United States	Relatively broad network of support in the field and wide recognition of dominant position in the policy field
Institutional response	No effective response	The World Bank adapts through internal reforms, external constructive engagements, and co-financing arrangements with the AIIB *(behavioural adaptation)*
Outcome	Appellate Body becomes inoperable	The World Bank remains the premier development bank

Director-General, and with it the Secretariat officials, is structurally weak, a clear lack of leadership was apparent throughout this case study. It is worth to first consider these structural weaknesses before considering the actual behaviour of the Director-General in (not) responding to the existential challenge to the Appellate Body. As a starting point, the rules and norms of the WTO expect the Director-General to refrain from taking an activist pose, as

reflected by the member-driven mantra of the organization. The institutional design of the WTO prescribes limited *formal competences* to secretariat officials, and their limited degree of influence is mainly exerted during trade negotiation rounds thanks to their expertise in international trade law (Elsig, 2011; Xu & Weller, 2008). Secretariat officials are often described as operating 'behind the scenes as active facilitators' during negotiations (Bohne, 2010; Buterbaugh & Fulton, 2007; Xu & Weller, 2008, p. 43). In other operational domains of the organization, however, the Director-General and Secretariat officials hold rather limited powers and influence (Bohne, 2010; Buterbaugh & Fulton, 2007).

While the Director-General supervises the recruitment of staff and the allocation of internal personnel and resources, including at the Appellate Body and its secretariat (Pauwelyn & Pelc, 2022; WTO, 1995), in practice WTO Secretariat officials in general are mainly expected to offer recommendations, take minutes during meetings and negotiations, and publish reports (Interview #A7). Therefore, a key factor for understanding the bureaucratic and internal authority-dynamics within the WTO is its *decentralized structure*. The Appellate Body and its dedicated secretariat are well insulated in practice from the rest of the institution (Pauwelyn & Pelc, 2022). This has been an intentional design feature to ensure that the Appellate Body, as in the case of many international courts, would enjoy autonomy from the political principals over which it adjudicates. A caveat to this, which also further reflects the member-driven character of the organization, is represented by the fact that the WTO General Council has the authority to engage with the Appellate Body's internal operations and reinterpret its rulings (WTO, 1994; Interview #A1). However, given the consensus rule through which the General Council operates, control over the Appellate Body is essentially close to impossible to achieve (Interviews #A4, #A5).

Importantly, the insulation enjoyed by the Appellate Body inhibits, by implication, much influence or control by the WTO Director-General and other officials. This effectively shields the Appellate Body from such (more politically oriented) institutional actors within the organization. In other words, the Director-General cannot easily impose behavioural changes upon the Appellate Body to address the concerns raised by the United States (e.g. regarding violations of operational procedures and use of precedent for case reviews) without uproar and resistance. Nevertheless, Directors-General do hold some influence within the WTO's institutional structure. Albeit limited, certain tools are feasibly available to them, including the authority to call meetings with restricted groups of member state representatives within the WTO headquarters, in addition to holding direct lines of communication

with relevant officials in state capitals and representing the public face of the organization (Interviews #A12, #A14, #A17).

Without strong formal competences in the WTO, and lacking the authority to intervene in the work and structure of the Appellate Body, the Director-General is at a clear disadvantage. In determining how far they are willing to go in employing their limited authority and informal channels, the Director-General's personality and *leadership* style are critical (Interviews #A14, #A17). Despite institutional constraints and pressures from the membership, Director-General Azevêdo's two predecessors, namely Renato Ruggiero (1995–1999) and Pascal Lamy (2005–2013), exhibited strong leadership on multiple occasions. In fact, both Ruggiero and Lamy are often recognized as having played a key role in the development of the WTO since its establishment in 1995 and in relation to the trade negotiations that took place under its multilateral framework. These two previous Directors-General thus provide a counterfactual in terms of WTO leadership through tough organizational episodes.

Director-General Ruggiero was known to take a direct approach in his engagements with officials and in particular ambassadors at the WTO. As noted elsewhere, he 'publicly humiliated ambassadors by threatening to call the ambassadors' superiors (for example, trade or foreign ministers) if ambassadors were reluctant to play a constructive role' (Elsig, 2011, p. 509). Director-General Lamy was also very vocal regarding his position, consistently calling officials in capitals to discuss issues (Interviews #A14, #A18). This was also the case during the early stages of the U.S. contestation of the Appellate Body. For instance, in response to the rhetorical attacks by the United States and in particular concerns raised regarding the drafting process of case reports, Lamy is said to have attempted to play an active mediating role and planned to intervene in the organization of the Appellate Body secretariat by reshuffling some of its staff and imposing restrictions on the number of its assistants (Interview #A12). This was a strategic move intended at decreasing the allocation of resources to the Appellate Body, with the aim being to ultimately pressure the Appellate Body to consider the concerns raised by the United States regarding the case report process (Interviews #A9, #A12).

In contrast, Director-General Azevêdo preferred to remain on the sidelines within the organization. Throughout the later stages of the Appellate Body contestation by the United States, he made it clear that he would keep following the line of the membership and refrain from any form of action that could be taunted as activism (Interviews #A9, #A14, #A17). Throughout the process of the contestation by the Trump administration, Azevêdo adopted not only a neutral stance towards the membership, but also towards the Appellate Body

staff (Interviews #A12, #A14, #A17). This was evidenced, for instance, when he intentionally remained on the sidelines in 2018 as the Trump administration demanded that the director of the Appellate Body secretariat be replaced (Interviews #A9, #A12, #A14). Strikingly, Azevêdo consistently held on to this approach even despite similar concerns regarding the Appellate Body and its secretariat officials having been raised by other staff within the WTO, including from officials at the Appellate Body itself (Interviews #A12).

Finally, the Director-General's office also kept a low-key public pose during the entirety of the Appellate Body crisis, with a conciliatory and neutral stance remaining the norm even on those rare occasions in which the Appellate Body issue was discussed in public engagements (Interviews #A9, #A14). For example, as the full membership of the WTO met on 19 July 2019, Azevêdo reportedly addressed concerns on the Appellate Body impasse and the need for institutional reforms with a typically neutral stance, stating that the 'process is for members to shape' and that 'some of the paths forward will not be followed by all, but they must be available to all and no one should be forced to take them' (WTO, 2019). He repeated this position later in 2020 at a Swiss-organized informal ministerial gathering, stating that 'WTO reform is—and should continue to be—an ongoing process of adapting to economic conditions and responding to members' concerns' (WTO, 2020a).

Just a few months before his resignation, Azevêdo spoke at the Washington International Trade Association Conference on the issues faced by the WTO, including the Appellate Body crisis, still keeping a staunchly neutral tone:

> [S]ome of the unconventional policies and bilateral arrangements we see today might never have arisen had we done more to update the system. The impasse on dispute settlement is a case in point. Many members, not only the United States, were dissatisfied with different aspects of how the Appellate Body was operating. It is my hope that members will use the current crisis to produce an improved two-step appeals process… Looking ahead, I am sure that WTO members are ready for change. They want to improve the system we have—not throw it away and attempt to start from scratch. (WTO, 2020b)

Even at his farewell speech to the General Council on 23 July 2020, Azevêdo directly touched upon other key issues that the WTO had to work on in the future, such as future negotiations, digital trade, the Covid-19 crisis, and so on. However, on the topic of the Appellate Body crisis, he essentially presented a similar line to before, albeit this time with a hunch at what may have been perceived as members' unwillingness to reach consensus: 'Finding a solution is not particularly hard, if you all truly want a solution. And in this

regard, I'm not sure this is where things stand' (WTO, 2020c). However, he also warned members not to 'assume that the WTO has a future irrespective of what you do here' (WTO, 2020c).

The fact that the Director-General essentially refrained from making much direct references to the causes of (or concrete solutions) to the Appellate Body crisis—such as the issue of over-judicialization—in public engagements may have aimed at providing an image of organizational unity and cohesion, and in conscious avoidance of adopting an activist role (Interview #A16). In fact, the impasse reflected wider tensions and fragmentation within the membership of the organization. The EU and various other members had clearly expressed their concern regarding the dysfunctionality of the Appellate Body, and tabled various proposals and solutions. However, these efforts were ultimately fruitless given the staunch position of the United States. This essentially positioned the United States against the rest of the membership, led by the EU (Hopewell, 2021a). Given the consensus norm, solving the impasse necessitated engagement with relevant actors within and outside the organization, such as key actors within member states, and substantial efforts towards building a support network in defence of the institution. In effect, however, Azevêdo's neutral approach, which prioritized the member-driven decision-making processes and norms of the WTO, may have ultimately resulted in the absence of a strong *external network* through which to exert influence within the domestic arena of the United States.

It is also important to note that, throughout the Appellate Body crisis, the Trump administration enjoyed relatively widespread support from the U.S. public with regard to world trade policies (Kim, 2020). Furthermore, across various past U.S. administrations, U.S. trade officials increasingly held negative views regarding the WTO (Interview #A1). More recently, there has also been bipartisan alignment within the U.S. Congress regarding the country's relationship with the WTO. In fact, in May 2020, both the House of Representatives and the Senate had resolutions and proposals introduced at their sessions proposing the U.S. withdrawal from the organization (Levy, 2020). Such a unitary domestic front in the United States on trade contrasts heavily with, for instance, the policy area of climate change (see Chapter 4). In contrast, WTO officials had little leeway for influencing domestic actors within the United States, be it lobby groups, NGOs, civil society actors, or Congress. Even as the more serious consequences of the Trump challenge began to manifest, little effort could be invested in ameliorating that situation and increasing the support for the organization within the domestic arena of the United States.

The culmination of Director-General Azevêdo's weak leadership came during the Covid-19 pandemic, when he unexpectedly and prematurely resigned, leaving the organization without leadership and direction to not only deal with the consequences of a dysfunctional Appellate Body but also a global crisis. It may be that, as a career diplomat, Director-General Azevêdo represented a disconnect with his predecessors Ruggiero and Lamy, who both had a civil service background and therefore may have been better used to proactiveness in fostering support of their institution despite constraints and inhibiting pressures. The new Director-General, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has now taken the reins of the WTO with a civil service background. It remains, however, difficult for her as well to revive the institution given the continuous contestation from the United States also under the Biden administration. In this respect, the assault of Trump on the WTO Appellate Body has structurally weakened this IO.

In sum, the WTO under Director-General Azevêdo lacked strong leadership during the crisis of the Appellate Body. The limited direction-giving and activism exhibited at the leadership level was exacerbated by the organizational structure of the WTO, which is rather fragmented and allows for near-complete autonomy and insulation for the Appellate Body. Furthermore, the limited formal competences of the WTO Secretariat officials, and the lack of an extensive external network (particularly within the domestic arena of the United States), were all inhibiting factors that resulted in the failure of the WTO's institutional leadership at devising and implementing an effective response strategy to the Trump challenge.

3.1.4 Outcome of the challenge to the Appellate Body

The case of the direct existential challenge to the WTO Appellate Body by the Trump administration shows how the leadership of institutional actors shapes their ability to devise and implement an effective response strategy to a challenge. It also highlights the significance of the organizational structure within those institutional actors and that a lack of formal competences and network embeddedness can limit strategic responses. As the case study illustrates, the WTO Secretariat, headed by its Director-General, was constrained in its ability to engage with relevant inside and outside actors, thus restricting its ability to muster the support of members and create a coalition of defenders against the contestation by the Trump administration. Furthermore, the lack of enough formal competences to effectively engage in agenda-setting, decision-, and policy-making processes of the organization meant that there

was little formal leverage to be employed by the WTO institutional actors to give direction and steer their organization in the face of the Appellate Body challenge. Indeed, the fact that the WTO institutional actors held few formal competences was interpreted by Director-General Azevêdo as an instruction to follow the line of the membership and refrain from any form of action that could be taunted as activism.

The constrained role of the WTO Secretariat and Director-General was exacerbated by the fragmented organizational structure of the WTO, holding only formally a top spot in the bureaucratic structure. Instead, the Appellate Body enjoys much autonomy and insulation in practice from the more politically oriented institutional actors of the organization. While Secretariat officials, and the Director-General in particular, may attempt at playing a more leading role within the organization, the unequivocally neutral stance and hands-off leadership approach by the former Director-General resulted in a WTO Secretariat that remained essentially on the sidelines during the entire process leading up to the Appellate Body's current inoperability. The autonomy of international adjudication bodies is, of course, not unusual (indeed, the WTO scores high on authority in many IO datasets precisely because of the distance that the Appellate Body has to the member states), but the case study of the WTO shows that organizational structure is clearly an institutional factor that affects IO responses.

Thus, the WTO lacked any serious response strategy for addressing the Trump administration's rhetorical and behavioural contestation of the organization (see Table 3.1 with an overview of the findings). As the consequences of the challenge began manifesting, little effort was made by the relevant institutional actors of the WTO to take on the reins of the organization and steer it away from the looming crisis. Instead, former Director-General Azevêdo publicly admitted that the organization needed reforming, and shortly after the Appellate Body's U.S.-led dysfunctionality had begun, he resigned prematurely to the surprise of many (BBC, 2020). The outcome of the challenge is clearly not positive for the WTO. The Appellate Body's paralysis has already proven to be very costly for the organization. The organization essentially cannot fully perform one of its core functions.

To address the paralysis of the Appellate Body, various WTO members led by the EU have developed patch-fixes. In lieu of the Appellate Body, they have established an alternative platform for solving interstate trade-related disputes, namely the Multi-Party Interim Agreement (MPIA) (Hopewell, 2021a; Howse, 2021). This has often been described as a temporary fix, to sit out the Trump administration, and it has not been able to fully replace the WTO Appellate Body, only engaging in a limited number of cases thus far. Strikingly

though, since the Biden administration made no serious efforts to reactivate the Appellate Body by restarting to appoint members, the MPIA may not remain so temporary after all. It is too early to tell, but we may arguably be witnessing the beginning of a gradual decline in the centrality of the WTO within the global trading system with dispute settlement organized through alternative forums.

As such, the outcome of this challenge not only threatens the ability of the WTO to enforce members' obligations to the organization's regulatory framework but in the longer term it may also seriously undermine the centrality of the WTO within the global trade arena (Hoekman & Mavroidis, 2021; Hopewell, 2021a; Schott & Jung, 2019). The WTO's success during its first two decades was in no small part due to the Appellate Body, which had often been described as the crown jewel of the WTO (Bown & Keynes, 2020; Walker, 2019). Thus, the inability of the WTO to perform one of its core functions, dispute settlement, through the Appellate Body represents a clear existential challenge. The effects of this outcome are still to be seen. What is clear is that this affects the WTO's wider mechanism for settling disputes. Without a functioning Appellate Body, members that receive unfavourable decisions by dispute settlement panel rulings may block such rulings by filing an appeal, a process that has been often referred to as 'appealing into the void' (Hopewell, 2021a).

It is therefore entirely possible that there may be a decrease in compliance by some members. Furthermore, the inoperability of the Appellate Body may not just threaten the enforcement of obligations to the organization's regulatory framework but also seriously undermine the momentum for future WTO trade negotiations (Hoekman & Mavroidis, 2021). It also risks corroding the rules-based trading system and, at its core, may represent a shaky future for the wider multilateral institutional framework for governing global trade (Hoekman & Mavroidis, 2021; Hopewell, 2021a; Schott & Jung, 2019; for a contending voice, see Vidigal, 2019).

3.2 World Bank and the creation of the AIIB

3.2.1 The World Bank and its main functions

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the World Bank Group is an IO affiliated with the UN system and was established in 1944 through the Bretton Woods Agreement. It began operations in June 1946. Today, the World Bank Group consists of five subsidiary agencies: the International Bank for

Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). The IBRD and the IDA are often referred to as 'the World Bank'. The World Bank has more than 170 member states, and its offices are spread around the globe (World Bank, 2022).

At its founding, the main goal of the World Bank was to provide financial assistance for the post-war economic recovery and reconstruction of European and Asian states. Its key goal has evolved from that original mandate into predominantly fighting poverty (World Bank, 2022). As such, the World Bank has been for decades the largest contributor of development assistance to middle- and low-income countries, where it plays a critical role in overseeing economic policies, setting macroeconomic agendas, and promoting institutional reforms. Already by the 1960s, the World Bank had expanded its operations to cover newly decolonized regions in the world, and its operational framework started to go beyond heavy infrastructure and gradually leaned more towards a broader approach to development, such as human development and public-sector governance (Guven, 2017). The World Bank pursues its goals by providing short- and long-term loans, technical assistance, and policy advice to lower and middle-income developing countries (World Bank, 2022). It operates mainly by providing grants and loans, incentivizing recipient countries to undertake policy reforms aimed at reducing poverty and increasing growth and equity based on mainstream economic solutions (Clemens & Kremer, 2016). Such initiatives often involve extensive negotiations with governments. The status of the World Bank, with its widely acknowledged expertise and legitimacy, has facilitated its role as a unique institution in the global development arena with the necessary collective bargaining power and policy influence to perform its mandate (Clemens & Kremer, 2016).

The over 16,000 staff working at the World Bank today are spread around 120 countries. Staff and day-to-day operations are overseen by senior management officials, who are themselves overseen by the World Bank President acting as the executive leadership of the organization and the World Bank Group as a whole (World Bank, 2011; Xu & Weller, 2009). In addition to the President, the organization has a Board of Directors (with twenty-five Executive Directors) and twenty-nine vice presidents (World Bank, 2022). Vice presidents assist the leadership by managing the World Bank's functions and services in specific regions and sectors. The World Bank President and the supporting officials oversee the policies and operations of the senior and

regional managers, and through them, decision-making is centralized (World Bank, 2011), thus representing and acting as the brains behind the organization (Interview #A22). When the AIIB was announced, the World Bank President was Jim Yong Kim (2012–2019).

Traditionally, the United States (the largest shareholder at the World Bank) has always nominated candidates for presidency. Candidates have also always been U.S. citizens. The World Bank's Board of Directors is tasked with confirming presidents, who are conferred five-year (renewable) terms of office. Apart from overseeing the operations of the World Bank, the President is also responsible for chairing meetings with the Board of Directors and its senior management. To be able to perform their tasks, the World Bank's design provides the institution's leadership with ample resources and authority. As the next sections illustrate, during moments of perceived challenge, this large arsenal of institutional tools allows the World Bank's leadership to effectively and quickly formulate solutions.

3.2.2 The establishment of the China-led AIIB

Almost coinciding with the announcement of the BRI in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping publicly announced that his country would be spearheading the establishment of a new multilateral development bank (MDB) which would focus mainly on infrastructure lending and development assistance, and have its membership open to any interested members from the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Wilson, 2019; Xiao, 2016). Its inception was hugely relevant for the Asian region in particular, but also had major implications globally, representing the first economic multilateral IO created by China, where the institution is also headquartered (Wilson, 2019). Several factors explain the logic behind the push for the AIIB's establishment in a policy environment dominated by the World Bank and occupied also by almost two dozen other existing MDBs.

First, the World Bank has been long criticized for its demanding conditionalities and standards. Since the 1970s, the World Bank's development model gradually shifted more towards human development and public-sector governance reforms, in line with what is often viewed as the Western-led approach to development (Guven, 2017). This has led to a growing interest by many developing and emerging states for an alternative institution that would focus more on infrastructure lending and less on governance issues. Second, following the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, a coalition of World Bank members began voicing more loudly their demand for infrastructure lending

as a key economic recovery tool from the crisis. Reforms at the World Bank had essentially failed at addressing this demand, thus boosting the momentum behind the establishment of an alternative institution that would focus exclusively on the infrastructure needs of states. These voices were spearheaded by a rising China, which has increasingly disputed its limited role and influence within the World Bank (Faude & Fuss, 2020; Pratt, 2021; Wilson, 2019).

The 2013 Durban Declaration illustrated this momentum, where the BRICS collectively expressed their view on what they perceived as an ongoing trajectory of change within a global economy regulated by an outdated governance architecture. The Declaration highlighted their commitment to innovative and alternative models of development and the need for more BRICS-led cooperation and initiatives for addressing infrastructure challenges (BRICS, 2013). In line with that, the former finance minister of China reportedly hinted at how the new institution would eschew some of the rules that Western countries had imported unto the normative and operational frameworks of existing MDBs by reflecting instead the development interests of emerging economies and developing countries (Bloomberg, 2015; Wilson, 2019).

For China, the main concern towards the World Bank was that its role has not been commensurate with its economic rise and current position within the global economy (Vestergaard & Wade, 2015; Xiao, 2016; Interview #A21). China's grievances in particular relate to what it views as a heavy under-representation as a World Bank member (Faude & Fuss, 2020; Xiao, 2016). In fact, China's shares within the World Bank amount to a meagre 4.5%, while its economy accounts for around 15% of the total global economic output. As such, China viewed the World Bank's voting system as having failed to reflect the current geopolitical realities (Faude & Fuss, 2020; Interview #A21). Moreover, the development approach espoused by Western-led international financial institutions and the normative framework of the Washington Consensus does not always align well with the distinctly state-led model of China and other emerging powers, which ascribe a more centralized approach to development finance (Guven, 2017; McNally, 2012; Woo-Cumings, 1999). The AIIB was announced on the backdrop of these trends.

Very quickly, commentators, academics, and practitioners alike debated the potential significance of the impetus behind the establishment and rise of the new China-led alternative development lending institution (for examples of commentaries see: Brands, 2018; Curran, 2018; Magnier, 2015; Perlez, 2015; for examples of academic papers see: Freeman, 2019; Reisen, 2015a,

2015b; Stephen & Skidmore, 2019; Wilson, 2019; Xiao, 2016; Yang, 2016).
A core premise behind some of the speculations was that, for the first time
since its creation, the development lending framework established under the
umbrella of the World Bank may be under threat by not just a new and
regional MDB but potentially by a wider momentum by many states for
an alternative institutional framework under the leadership of China and
BRICS. In other words, when the Chinese President Xi Jinping announced
the plans for the AIIB, this was perceived by some as representing a broader
trend that could potentially undermine the focality and relevance of the
World Bank and the Western-led development lending framework within
that arena, and potentially carrying the threat of affecting the long-term con-
tinuity and universality of the standards and practices that have for decades
been grounded through the extant institution (Reisen, 2015a; Interviews
#A22, #A30).

The main driver of the early speculations on the more *strategic* nature
of China's goals was that observers essentially questioned the reasoning
behind the creation of a new MDB within an already-crowded landscape,
instead of opting for more engagement in existing MDBs (Wilson, 2017).
Chinese and AIIB officials consistently expressed a singular answer to these
allegations. They stressed that the main goal behind the new institutional
initiative was to address the infrastructure funding gap caused by lagging
capital supply, but observers at the time also highlighted that the extent to
which the AIIB could help fill that gap was questionable (Wilson, 2017).
Existing MDBs in the field, such as the World Bank and the ADB, have
benefitted from a long history of engagement in infrastructure lending and
development finance. Through this, they have established extensive pro-
grammes and pipelines and accumulated significant expertise. By entering
the field, the AIIB would essentially duplicate these efforts (Roach et al.,
2015). Moreover, the lack of capital investment in infrastructure develop-
ment has often been traced to the limited availability of bankable projects
(Kortekaas, 2015). Critics noted that MDBs struggle to fund infrastructure
projects mostly because these are not always considered viable investments,
rather than due to capital shortages (Wilson, 2017). This was a significant
concern, as the presence of the new institution in the landscape was seen
as potentially leading to more competition for the already-limited range
of bankable projects, thus resulting in the redistribution of funding across
existing investment-ready projects rather than the expansion of the infras-
tructure funding base, which could have been achieved instead by offering
more capital to existing MDBs (ASPI, 2016; Sun, 2015; *The Economist*, 2015;
Wilson, 2017).

Importantly, the AIIB's lending packages were expected not only to cost less but also to require fewer conditionalities than those of the World Bank, thus potentially leading to competitive pressures rather than complementarity. As a World Bank official noted, the 'view at the senior level [was] that while the Bank had been focusing for decades on governance, institution building and corruption, the AIIB [would] suddenly begin providing the same sort of services without all those goals and conditionalities' (Interview #A29). As such, while the infrastructure lending arena is always said to have a higher demand than supply could ever meet, there were concerns about the presence of alternative institutional frameworks having the potential to undermine the World Bank's established standards in the long term (Ella, 2021; Reisen, 2015a; Interviews #A20, #A39). Given the widespread discontent with the World Bank and the rising presence of alternatives, there was a view that had the World Bank not existed today, it would not have been created in its current form again (Interview #A23).

In sum, there were initial concerns that there was a risk of a race to the bottom in terms of lending and project standards, and that this would go beyond just projects involving members that were unhappy with the conditionalities of the World Bank, but potentially also trickle into lending in the increasingly common collaboration efforts with the private sector (Interview #A21). As such, the plan for the establishment of the AIIB was seen as potentially representing China's new momentum in spearheading a revisionist agenda in the development lending arena (Interviews #A20, #A23, #A25), as well as pointing at a wider impetus for parallel structures promoting a realignment of the international order (Reisen, 2015a).

The AIIB was perceived as potentially fronting that trend (Wang, 2017), providing China in practice with a key tool within the arena for contesting the Washington Consensus and pursuing its geostrategic ambitions and shadow global diplomacy (Reisen, 2015a). To the very least, the presence of the AIIB was seen by some as signalling a trend towards what appears as competitive regime creation and a more fragmented future for the global development arena (Faude & Parizek, 2021), one in which the focality enjoyed by the existing framework pushed by the United States through the World Bank and the institution's future relevance, may be at stake. The creation of the AIIB was thus an indirect existential challenge to the World Bank, as it had the potential not just to challenge the focality of the World Bank in infrastructure lending but also to uproot the established norms in the development lending arena of which the World Bank is a core stakeholder.

3.2.3 The World Bank's response to the creation of the AIIB

In contrast to the case study of the WTO Appellate Body, the World Bank's response can be described as a proactive *behavioural adaptive response* (see Table 3.1). To the World Bank leadership and particularly President Jim Yong Kim, it was clear that the indirect challenge of the AIIB required a strategic response from the World Bank. Rather than acting as an incumbent IO and resisting the new challenger, the World Bank reached out to the AIIB with the aim of shaping the new institution and jointly engaging in infrastructural lending. At the same time, the World Bank also adapted its own organization in order to reduce tensions within the membership but also to strengthen itself as a focal institution in development lending. The World Bank's response was therefore strongly proactive. While World Bank actors tailored the response to the type of indirect challenge presented by the AIIB, their institutional abilities to respond need to be underlined. Leadership was particularly present in formulating and implementing this strategic response. But World Bank actors also benefited from their formal competences, the organizational structure, and their network.

The large arsenal of *formal competences* and the central role provided by the *organizational structure* of the World Bank to its institutional leadership allow it to recognize issues and formulate solutions effectively (Interviews #A23, #A27). The ability of the World Bank's President to give direction to the institution comes through its crucial position as a conduit between the Board of Executive Directors and the World Bank's broader management (World Bank, 2011). The same is true for its role vis-à-vis the Board of Governors. The Board of Governors officially provides a platform for members to guide the wider policies of the World Bank. However, in practice, the institution's leadership bridges between members and the institution, thus acting as a channel for effectively balancing interests (Xu & Weller, 2009; Interviews #A22, #A32). The President is unlikely to adopt key strategies or push for radical change without consulting and assessing support from Board members. However, the fact that stakeholders often come with demands but generally cannot push for anything alone provides the World Bank's leadership with leeway for balancing initiatives that follow their vision for the institution (Weaver, 2008; Interview #A27).

The high degree of complexity in the World Bank's tasks, which requires significant resources to review, and successful past efforts by Bank presidents to promote governance practices that inhibited the Board of Executive Directors from interfering with the daily operations also mean that the Board holds essentially minimal oversight over daily operations and involvement in

management (Weaver, 2008). Moreover, World Bank presidents act as the figurehead of the institution externally, spending much of their time engaging with officials in capitals and engaging with *external networks* (Edwards, 2019; Xu & Weller, 2009; Interview #A22). These roles and powers allow World Bank presidents to proactively engage with external actors, steer the World Bank into collaborative relations with actors within relevant global networks, initiate co-financing partnerships with other institutions, and importantly, gain enough leverage to foster support for policies when facing potential resistance from stakeholders (Interviews #A23, #A27). As such, the World Bank's leadership has a wide manoeuvring space for imparting its vision into the organization and leading it accordingly (Weaver, 2008). As one official noted, the institution is 'definitely a place where leadership models matter … the President and senior management take the lead' (Interview #A20).

When the AIIB was initially announced, Jim Yong Kim was the President of the World Bank (2012–2019). His *leadership* approach has been described as assertive and hands-on. He was very proactive from the start in his role, consistently engaging with stakeholders and relevant officials. Nathan Sheets, then Under-Secretary for International Affairs at the U.S. Department of Treasury, reportedly noted that Kim was 'extraordinary in articulating a vision and mission … he was truly a voice for the World Bank, and he could go and have conversations with heads of state and other senior global figures and excite them about the role of the bank and development' (as cited in Edwards, 2019). His leadership role at the Bank was perhaps best reflected by the fact that he directly initiated and supervised what has been widely referred to as 'radical reforms' within the organization (Rice, 2016). Less than a year since his presidency had begun, Kim announced 'a set of sweeping changes to align the staff, finances, and priorities of the global institution to meet the twin goals of ending extreme poverty by 2030 and boosting shared prosperity for the bottom 40 percent of the population in developing countries' (World Bank, 2013). This was part of what he envisioned as the 'twin goals' (Edwards, 2019).

Kim actively implemented that vision by restructuring and 'de-siloifying' the World Bank internally, so as to allow for more decision-making breadth for regional managers on the field and enhance intra-institutional knowledge creation and sharing (Interview #A31). He publicly justified these reforms, noting that they addressed what he perceived as a deep 'frustration' within the Bank, stating that the organization's staff 'chafed at a bureaucracy that had turned our six regional units into silos, with each one reluctant to share its technical expertise with the others' (World Bank, 2013). His direct involvement in the reform process was reflected by his plans for the creation of a

'Presidential Delivery Unit' which would focus 'on the Bank Group's performance as an institution and to share data and lessons across the institution and with the rest of the world' (World Bank, 2013).

The publicized goals of Kim's reorganization plan were to effectively secure the 'delivery of transformational solutions, marshalling combined resources effectively, and accelerating collaborations with private sector partners' and to 'improve knowledge flows and the delivery of multisector solutions to clients' (World Bank, 2014). However, Kim's vision for the Bank went beyond narrow concerns for the organization's bureaucracy. His reforms were seen as 'necessary to appease the bank's shareholders, who were unhappy about escalating administrative costs and 'siloed' work streams' (Edwards, 2019). The long-run goal of these reforms was also to ensure that the World Bank would remain the central knowledge-creator within the global development arena, particularly in the area of human capital investment (Interview #A27). In fact, the World Bank is today by far the biggest financier of the social sections of development, which are increasingly central to development standards and norms (Interview #A25). As a Bank official explained, strengthening its capabilities in that area has been critical to ensuring the World Bank's norm-setting authority and relevance, and providing its development framework with credibility and legitimacy (Interview #A29). This is crucial to ensuring that capital is directed through the World Bank rather than other institutions. The overcrowded environment in which the Bank operates means that the institution may potentially have to compete with other MDBs to secure scarce resources (Weaver, 2008).

Moreover, prior to his presidency there had been a strong push for restructuring the World Bank's shareholding system, having some shares reallocated away from the United States and instead given to China. This was aimed at addressing China's demands for an increased say within the institution. Under Kim's predecessor, Robert Zoellick, it was agreed that China's shareholder status would be enhanced under a new formula that would increase the country's voting share from the meagre 2.7% at which it laid previously (Reuters, 2010). This process continued under Kim, who had highlighted the need for such reforms to address the concerns of emerging powers. During his tenure, the shareholding recalculation at the Bank underwent a further review, and, by the end of his presidency, China's voting power accounted for over 4.3% (World Bank, 2019). At the same time, to address U.S. concerns regarding China's borrowing limits, the plan aimed at imposing more borrowing limits on China (Heydarian, 2019; Interview #A31). Kim's presidency also addressed concerns regarding under-representation of non-Western states by hiring a chief economist, a vice president, and various

senior management staff of Chinese nationality, as well as a chief economist of Indian origin, and a vice president who was a former finance minister from Brazil.

These changes reflected the Kim presidency's efforts at balancing the demands of China, the broader frustrations expressed by BRICS countries, U.S. concerns towards them, and consequent tensions within the organization's membership (Interview #A22). As one official noted, in the long term the aim was to 'embrace' the Chinese-led AIIB, rather than letting them go at it alone with alternative frameworks (Interview #A24). The initiatives therefore aimed at strategically navigating the growing momentum for alternative solutions to what emerging powers increasingly criticized as the Western-led institutional framework for global development. The growing influence of emerging powers had come in tandem with an increasing contestation of the normative authority of Western-led multilaterals and the policy orthodoxy behind their understanding of development, as well as competitive pressures reflected by new institutional initiatives, such as the AIIB (Guven, 2017). While the push for new global initiatives was clearly perceived and acknowledged, Kim's presidency viewed collaboration and constructive engagement as the ideal solution (Interview #A23). In fact, and on the backdrop of the internal components of his plans for the World Bank, Kim pushed for a clear line of strategic and constructive collaborative narrative in its external engagements with the new China-led initiative, albeit highlighting the dominant role that the Bank would hold in future partnerships.

Just a few months before the AIIB's agreement officially entered into force, President Kim very clearly expressed his view on the path that the entrant institution could take should collaboration be pursued instead of competition. He noted that 'if the world's multilateral banks, including the new ones, can form alliances, work together and support development that addresses these challenges, we all benefit' (as cited in Devex, 2015). At the same time, he stressed the importance of the necessary conditions being in place, such as 'labour and procurement standards' and revealed that he would directly engage in discussions on potential collaboration with Chinese officials (as cited in Devex, 2015; ECNS, 2015). 'Your enemy cannot be other institutions. Your enemy has to be poverty' he reportedly stated, stressing that collaboration is the obvious path if fighting poverty is really the main goal (as cited in Devex, 2015). He emphasized his view on the shape that inter-institutional relations between the World Bank and the AIIB would take. As he noted, the 'World Bank can, and will, act as a big brother' and that it would do so by 'providing them over 50 years' worth of knowledge and expertise' (as cited in Devex, 2015).

The Kim presidency's strategy paid off, as very soon the two institutions began devising a collaborative partnership agreement that essentially provided the World Bank the role of a leading partner. Within the global lending arena, the World Bank leads in terms of globally recognized safeguards and development expertise, thus making it a strategic partner for other MDBs in co-financing development projects (Interviews #A34, #A36). Given its central position, collaborative engagements with the World Bank provide new MDBs with a valuable rubber stamp that endows them and their projects with credibility and legitimacy (Interview #A31). Furthermore, from the perspective of new institutions, partnering with the World Bank means gaining access to the much needed technical expertise and the institutional know-how for developing and extending the new institution's project pipelines (Kawai, 2015; Wilson, 2019). In fact, entrant institutions often begin with a relative disadvantage in development lending due to the lack of experience and relevant technical expertise. This sometimes necessitates an initial reliance on external consultations and efforts to secure bankable projects with already-established MDBs in order to better kickstart projects (ASPI, 2016; Wilson, 2019).

Moreover, the AIIB had initially failed to attract enough interest from some potential members, particularly Western countries. Their main concern was related to the governance structures and operational protocols of the new MDB (Interviews #A35, #A38). The U.S. government staunchly opposed the AIIB. It questioned whether the new institution would follow the same degree of strict standards promoted by the likes of the World Bank and heavily lobbied other countries to follow suit in declining membership (Harris, 2015; Wilson, 2019). This view was also shared by the Japanese government, which was concerned about potential competition with the ADB in addition to concerns regarding transparency at the AIIB (Katada, 2016; Wilson, 2019). More broadly, Western countries feared that the originally proposed institutional structure of the new MDB would bring it wholly under the control of China thanks to exclusive veto powers and influence in decision-making processes (Thomas & Hutzler, 2015; Magnier, 2015; Wei & Davis, 2015; Interviews #A35, #A38). The concerns relating to potential lack of conformity with the established governance, transparency, safeguard, and loan-policy norms and practices of the global development lending arena, were also shared by other Western governments. This would have played a big role in making the AIIB unattractive in the eyes of future stakeholders, thus discouraging potential members from joining with the new MDB early on (Interviews #A35, #A38). Although many European countries joined the AIIB, bringing changes to the original design and practices proposed by China, the scepticism regarding

the institution was undoubtedly felt within the development financing arena.

The Kim presidency was aware of the fact that 'the AIIB will need assistance' from the Bank (Interview #A20). Its status was strategically leveraged towards fostering constructive external engagements with the new MDB from the start (Interviews #A24, #A25, #A31). These included inter-institutional exchanges and co-financing partnership arrangements (Interviews #A24, #A32, #A33). For the World Bank, engaging with the AIIB would have offered a practical channel through which to essentially try and model the new institution. As one World Bank official described, 'the engagements, the movement of staff, individuals going from the Bank to the AIIB, helped with that' (Interview #A24). These initiatives were an 'intentional strategy' to ensure that individuals and advisors would go to the AIIB and ensure that there would be 'contact between them and help lessen the divide' between the two institutions (Interview #A24). As recalled by another official, 'from the management's point of view this was important to make sure that the Bank pulls other MDBs towards itself . . . In its basic level, it just means that they work together, but in practice it also means that they follow the Bank' (Interview #A25). Another interviewee recalled how 'they [current and former Bank staff] were sent to the AIIB, many of them from infrastructure and planning … to set standards, provide training and sometimes in an advisory role following the Bank's own internal protocol' (Interview #A32). This practice has been around for long, with many MDBs' officials often joining the ranks of these institutions with decades of prior experience at the World Bank, and 'with them they bring expertise' (Interview #A34). The AIIB has become a similar case, where several high-ranking officials had World Bank experience prior to joining (AIIB, 2024; Interview #A34). The movement of Bank staff to other institutions enhances their 'credibility and legitimacy' while also facilitating the export of the vision and normative 'views of the Bank' (Interview #A20).

Thus, these early strategic efforts may have strengthened the pull-factor for the AIIB to follow the existing norms and standards pushed by the World Bank within the development arena and thus ultimately avoid the possibility of a race to the bottom in terms of safeguards, which would be detrimental to the World Bank and its global mission (Interview #A25). Moreover, there was a strategic advantage in collaborating with other MDBs in areas where overlap in operations can occur. As noted by a World Bank official, the World Bank prefers not to 'finance in areas anymore where it thinks other institutions can finance in' (Interview #A31). The AIIB's clear infrastructure-heavy focus meant that the World Bank could co-finance some future projects

with it while extending its operations in other areas such as human capital development and non-heavy infrastructure projects. As that official explained further, 'the Bank has also increased its presence in those countries where the demand for infrastructure is high by co-financing with the AIIB. This is strategic really because otherwise the Bank would keep its focus away from those projects' (Interview #A31).

Importantly, early-on engagements with the AIIB by the World Bank under the Kim presidency set the ground for ensuring that co-financing would follow suit with the World Bank's model and framework for development lending (Fleming, 2016; Interview #A29; Wilson, 2019). As one official noted, 'co-financing is a sort of tool for that . . . What happens is that they exchange knowledge and initiate projects together but the Bank is careful to set things and make sure that [it] keeps its role in that' (Interview #A29). In other words, the focus was on ensuring that these partnerships would rely on the loan policy and safeguards framework of the World Bank. Furthermore, the World Bank's key role within such partnerships would be generally set as that of a knowledge hub, and its focus would remain on institution-building and governance standards, while the funding of projects would be mainly left to the AIIB (Freeman, 2019; Interview #A29). As one official put it, 'the idea has been that the [World] Bank would bring the knowledge and the AIIB would bring the resources' (Interview #A29).

The results of these efforts essentially culminated through the co-financing agreement signed by the World Bank and the AIIB in April 2016 (World Bank, 2016). This paved the way for collaborative partnerships on infrastructure projects and, importantly, stipulated that these would be conducted primarily under the loan policy and safeguards framework of the World Bank (Fleming, 2016; Wilson, 2019). In most of the co-financed projects with the AIIB, the World Bank has held the role of the 'knowledge-creator' and 'institution-builder' while the former mainly contributes in terms of funding (Freeman, 2019; Interview #A29). The AIIB has welcomed such initiatives from the start. Partnering with the World Bank provides credibility to the AIIB and its projects, and allows it to benefit from the former's already-established project pipelines as well as its expertise (Interview #A32). As a World Bank official noted, 'they [AIIB] want the World Bank stamp, and the sort of legitimacy and credibility that the [World] Bank's knowledge and social and environmental safeguards provide, as this helps them attract more private funding' (Interview #A26).

To summarize the response of World Bank institutional actors to the creation of the AIIB, they proactive dealt with this indirect challenge. Indeed, they used a twin strategy of behavioural adaptation to maintain the World

Bank as the central development lender and to avoid potential fragmentation in policies and development norms among the MDBs. First, the World Bank engaged itself in comprehensive reforms aimed at reestablishing itself. Second, the World Bank actively reached out to the AIIB to work together as partner MDBs. The adaptive response can be explained as the only reasonable option in light of the investment made by China into the potential rival AIIB. But for the intensity and the proactiveness of the World Bank in dealing with this existential challenge, we need to consider institutional factors, in particular leadership by top World Bank officials in strategically responding.

3.2.4 Outcome of the challenge to the World Bank

The World Bank's leading institutional actors played a prominent role in the formulation and implementation of its *behavioural adaptive response* strategy (see Table 3.1 with an overview of the findings). Jim Yong Kim displayed particularly a strong leadership approach from the start of his presidency at the World Bank, effectively using the ample arsenal of institutional tools and opportunity structures at its disposal to actively push for reforms and new policies. These initially included plans for crucial reforms within the institution with the goal of balancing the interests and expectations of key members (e.g. China) and improving the organizational processes of the World Bank. These efforts also aimed at strengthening its knowledge-producing capabilities and focus on norm-setting, knowledge-creation, and institution-building, and ultimately help ensure the institution's long-term relevance within the development lending arena.

The World Bank's leadership pre-emptively pushed for constructive external engagements in the early stages of the AIIB's inception to allow for inter-institutional collaboration and exchanges. The 2016 co-financing agreement between the two institutions reflected the effective push for collaborative relations and partnerships on infrastructure projects based on the World Bank's lending framework (Fleming, 2016; Wilson, 2019; Interview #A29). Further testament to the results of the efforts for inter-institutional constructive engagements by the World Bank under the Kim presidency is that, in its early operations the AIIB co-financed eleven of its first fifteen lending projects with the World Bank, and this trend has only increased in recent years (AIIB, n.d.; Faude & Fuss, 2020; Interviews #A24, #A31). Between 2019 and 2021, the World Bank co-financed on average approximately a quarter of the AIIB's projects. The World Bank and its policy and safeguards framework take a leading role in such projects.

Whether the progression and the long-term impact of the AIIB's presence will ultimately reflect a broad unsettling of the World Bank or a sharper turn towards Chinese leadership and alternative institutions for global development is yet to be seen. The AIIB's potential is clear. Its membership has expanded greatly since its inception was announced, and the institution has secured a large budget for its investment portfolio (Faude & Parizek, 2021; Freeman, 2019; Reisen, 2015a). By 2019, the AIIB was holding the fourth spot in ranking amongst its peers in terms of capital subscriptions (Wilson, 2019). By 2023, the AIIB's membership included 109 countries from various regions in the world (AIIB, 2023). Recent studies have already begun examining its observable implications. A study by Jing Qian and colleagues (2023), for example, shows that the AIIB's founding members have at least temporarily relied less on the World Bank for infrastructure projects. They note that the trend may suggest that 'the AIIB founders have begun to turn their backs on the World Bank' (Qian et al., 2023, p. 220).

Nevertheless, what is clear for now is that the AIIB's design, governance, and operational framework have been effectively aligned with the general norms and practices established mainly through the World Bank in the development lending arena (Wilson, 2019 Interview #A33). However, the institution does also exhibit some notable differences from its peers. Its membership design includes a non-regional group controlling the main decisions taken at the institution (and holding most of its capital stock and share of spots at the Board of Directors), and China remains the only member with an informal veto where super-majority voting is required (Wilson, 2019). Meanwhile, China also continues to set forth its ambitions for a stronger role as an alternative leader within the global development arena (McCarthy, 2023; Hawkins, 2023; Moritsugu, 2023).

3.3 Conclusion

The empirical investigations of this chapter focused on the responses of the WTO and the World Bank to existential challenges (see Table 3.1 for an overview of the findings). Whereas the WTO Appellate Body was directly challenged by the United States, the World Bank was indirectly challenged by China through the creation of the AIIB as a rival institution. In this conclusion to the chapter, we summarize and compare the findings of both case studies to better understand why institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges.

The case study on the WTO explained the lack of an effective response to the threat of inoperability of the Appellate Body. Despite heading a central institution within the global trade arena, WTO institutional actors could not do much to address the Trump challenge given their weak position and authority within the organization. The role of the WTO Secretariat and Directors-General is much constrained by its institutional design. The strict institutional rules and norms of the WTO greatly limit the ability of its institutional actors to proactively engage with relevant actors within and outside the organization, set agendas, build coalitions of supporters, and intervene in the workings of the organization. As such, the WTO's institutional leadership, represented by Director-General Roberto Azevêdo and his supporting officials, could not effectively produce a response. Their efforts were also hampered by the institution's fragmented structure, where the Appellate Body and its officials essentially enjoy near-complete autonomy from the bureaucratic machinery. The institution's leadership also failed to proactively engage with the challenge and muster support from members, thus exhibiting a lack of political leadership. Ultimately, other actors in the WTO, such as the EU, took initiative to set up the MPIA in light of the inoperability of the Appellate Body.

The second case study focused on the World Bank and the challenge posed by the China-led push for the creation of an alternative institution that was initially widely perceived as representing a potential threat to the former's relevance within the global lending arena. As the case study illustrated, the World Bank aimed at adapting to the establishment and rise of the new alternative institution through an effective response plan. The findings show how this was devised thanks to the broad institutional authority, competences, and opportunity structures available to the World Bank's leadership. Under the leadership of former President Jim Yong Kim and with the support of his cabinet officials and bureaucracy, the World Bank proactively engaged with issues and formulated relevant solutions. Reforms were aimed at improving the World Bank's knowledge-production capabilities and increasing its bureaucratic efficiency, in addition to supporting previous efforts at restructuring the shareholding system to address key grievances by China (regarding its voice within the institution) and the United States (regarding China's borrowing limits). On the external side, the World Bank's leadership strategically pushed for constructive engagements during the early phases of the establishment of the AIIB, with the aim of securing inter-organizational partnerships (through co-financing agreements) and thus encouraging conformity with the established normative framework and operational standards.

The findings of this chapter help illustrate the factors that explain variation in IO institutional actors' responses to existential challenges. As a starting point, they highlight the importance of specific responses to different types of challenges. In conformity with the expectations of Chapter 2 (Proposition 1), the indirect challenge of the AIIB was met by the World Bank actors pursuing an adaptive response. While the WTO institutional actors did not proactively respond to the direct challenge posed by the United States, there was still a status quo bias with WTO actors and other key member states (such as the EU) resisting an erosion of the authority of the Appellate Body. The non-response by WTO actors was likely guided by wishful thinking that the problems would blow over.

While we see therefore some evidence that the chosen responses are tailored to the existential challenge at hand, the way in which they were formulated and implemented greatly depended on the abilities of the institutional actors (Proposition 2). The case studies particularly highlight the role played by IO institutional features and strong political leadership in shaping effective responses. Even where institutional actors possess necessary resources (i.e. a sizeable secretariat), their ability to pull their weight and address existential challenges ultimately rests on strong and assertive political leadership by their executive heads in tandem with favourable organizational structures for them to be able to pursue their goals. In short, the WTO leadership was weak in the case study of the Appellate Body and the World Bank leadership strong in the case of the AIIB challenge. This made a significant difference in terms of the responses by both IOs to the two existential challenges. Importantly, and as mentioned earlier in the chapter, while there may be congruence between the response pushed by institutions and the resulting outcome of their challenges, the focus here has been on identifying those responses and highlighting the role of leading institutional actors and their bureaucracies in the process behind it. As such, establishing the causal link between the responses and the outcomes of challenges has not been the ambition here.

In Chapters 4 and 5, the book continues with the analysis of institutional responses to existential challenges by studying respectively IO actors in the areas of climate and energy as well as security and defence.

4
Climate and Energy

IOs are regularly challenged by states, both through direct contestation and indirectly through the creation of other IOs. This may put them at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out some of their core functions or sustain their dominance and relevance within their policy arenas. The previous chapter (Chapter 3) on the WTO and the World Bank has provided the first empirical analysis of the argument of this book. It has highlighted great variation in the abilities of WTO and World Bank actors to respond to existential challenges. While the World Bank crafted a clear response strategy following the creation of the AIIB, institutional actors in the WTO did little as the Trump administration blocked the appointment of judges to the Appellate Body. This chapter continues the empirical analysis to better understand why the institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges. The focus is on IOs in the policy area of climate change and energy. It zooms in on two existential challenges experienced respectively by the UNFCCC and the IEA.

This chapter starts by studying the existential challenge that the Trump administration posed to the UNFCCC by withdrawing from the Paris Agreement. Announced in June 2017, and effective in November 2020, the U.S. withdrawal posed a major challenge to continued cooperation on climate change and environmental politics. It also meant an existential challenge for the UNFCCC, since the Paris Agreement relies on 'universal participation for legitimacy' (Kemp, 2017, p. 86). The anticipation, by many observers, was that the withdrawal by the United States could lead to a domino effect of other member states following the American example (Interview #B4). After all, this precise scenario had happened following the U.S. non-ratification of the previous Kyoto Protocol. Rather than responding publicly and forcefully to the U.S. withdrawal, the UNFCCC Secretariat therefore set out to prevent further withdrawals by activating its large network of like-minded state and non-state actors in support for climate action (von Allwörden, 2024). Eventually not a single other state withdrew from the Paris Agreement. When President Biden took office in January 2021, the United States could simply rejoin the Agreement which had been kept alive.

To understand the response of institutional actors within the UNFCCC to the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, it is first important to point at this type of existential challenge, the direct contestation by a major power. This, by default, limited the response options. For the UNFCCC, it would have been impossible to accept the demands of President Trump and pursue a strategy of adaptation, as this would not just undermine the core mandate of the UNFCCC of climate change action but also likely unravel the Agreement resulting in a race to the bottom with the other countries making demands. The specific type of challenge thus affected the menu of options on the table for UNFCCC institutional actors, leaving a strategy of resistance the only viable response to this existential challenge.

How the UNFCCC institutional actors pursued such a response of resistance requires us to study their institutional abilities. The UNFCCC Secretariat itself, despite a staff of 450 officials, is a relatively light treaty secretariat with a mandate to facilitate treaty implementation mainly through the Conferences of the Parties (COPs). Following the experience with the Kyoto Protocol (1998–2001) and particularly the failed Copenhagen Summit (2009), however, the UNFCCC Secretariat started to develop its external profile. In particular, it cultivated relations with like-minded state and non-state actors to strengthen climate change action beyond the formal governmental COP meetings. When President Trump was elected, this external network effectively activated itself to explicitly engage with the contestation of climate change by the Trump administration. The UNFCCC Secretariat officials could stay in the background and follow the set-out protocol to keep the machinery running. In other words, the embeddedness in external networks was the determining institutional feature. With a wide variety of actors coming out in favour of climate action and relegitimizing the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement survived the Trump Presidency.

The second case study of this chapter is about the indirect existential challenge to the IEA posed by three member states (Germany, Denmark, and Spain) when they set up the competing institution IRENA, in 2009, to deal with renewable energy. With its traditional focus on fossil fuels, the IEA had long been accused of not doing enough in terms of energy transition to tackle climate change. Also, the IEA was criticized for its Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)-country exclusive membership: Since the IEA was originally set up under the framework of the OECD, in response to the Oil Crisis of 1973, only OECD countries can

become members of the IEA. This membership restriction means a neglect of many rising powers, such as India and China, which have heavily increased their energy consumption over time (Van de Graaf, 2012, 2013).

The newly created IRENA catered to these criticisms by having a universal membership and focusing on renewable energy resources. Indeed, 165 countries have joined IRENA to date compared to the IEA which only has thirty members. The very fact that three IEA members felt the need to go outside the IEA framework, where they considered that renewables were not sufficiently addressed, and to indirectly create a competing institution meant an even greater existential crisis for the IEA. There was the potential that this would affect the central position of the IEA in the broader energy regime. While this existential challenge was clear from the very beginning, with IEA institutional actors initially trying to push back the creation of IRENA (Van de Graaf & Lesage, 2009, p. 309), it took a while for the IEA to effectively respond following the creation of IRENA.

Only with the arrival of the new Executive Director Fatih Birol in 2015, and with the parallel adoption of the Paris Agreement as a catalyst, the IEA started to adapt itself by including energy transition and climate change prominently in its activities and providing associate membership to non-OECD members. Internally, the IEA also hired new staff and fostered cooperation with other IOs to build its renewable energy expertise. Birol became vocal on the necessity of energy transition to fight climate change and he intensified his presence in different international fora. The IEA is now perceived as 'a valuable partner one which is clearly extremely well placed in the global system because climate policy in the end requires fundamental transformation of energy systems and ... that expertise they have, has been valuable' (Interview #B28). The IEA might have been slow to respond to the creation of IRENA but eventually included climate action through institutional layering (putting these new functions on top of its traditional mandate), which is an instance of behavioural and discursive adaptation. The type of existential challenge thus affected the IO response, yet we need to study the abilities of institutional actors to understand how this response was pursued in the case of the IEA. Leadership turned out an important variable.

These two case studies of the UNFCCC and IEA provide further insight into the factors that may explain variation in IO institutional actors' responses to existential challenges. Even where IO institutional actors possess necessary latent resources (i.e. a sizeable secretariat), their ability to pull

their weight and address existential challenges ultimately rests on their institutional features. Interestingly, the UNFCCC and IEA occupy some middle group compared to the cases of the World Bank and WTO in Chapter 3. The UNFCCC and IEA were not as proactive as the World Bank in addressing the existential challenge. At the same time, they were clearly not as passive as the WTO. The UNFCCC relied heavily on its embeddedness in an external network of climate action, which it had explicitly helped to nurture. This indirect response made sense given particularly its weaker formal competences. Much of the IEA's adaptation to climate change goals was, belatedly, driven by the political leadership of the new Director-General through a layering strategy. The case studies also provide further evidence of the fact that the response chosen is tailored to the type of existential challenge with resistance to the direct challenge of the Trump administration to the Paris Agreement, and adaptation in light of the indirect challenge of IRENA to the IEA.

As with Chapter 3, the focus here is only on identifying the response strategies pursued by IOs to existential challenges and highlighting the role of leading institutional actors and their bureaucracies in that process. What the impact has been of the Trump administration on climate change more generally is beyond the scope. The next sections discuss the UNFCCC and IEA case studies. They begin by introducing the respective IOs and their main functions, before turning to the specific existential challenges under study. The sections then examine the institutional responses pushed by the respective IOs, before turning to the outcome of the episode and offering a recap of the findings.

4.1 The UNFCCC and the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement

4.1.1 The UNFCCC and its main functions

The UNFCCC is the key international institution to organize the governance and cooperation in the global climate regime. It was founded following the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit and it entered into force in March 1994. Under the Framework Convention, the UNFCCC brings together various agreements, commitments, and protocols, including the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement. The UNFCCC also administers the nationally determined contributions (NDCs), which are non-binding national plans by all

the members to mitigate climate change and which include targets for reductions in greenhouse gasses. The UNFCCC has universal membership and includes all 193 members of the UN and five other member parties (such as the Cook Islands, the Holy See, and the EU). Besides holding the big summit of the COP each year, attended by tens of thousands of participants, the UNFCCC supports several preparatory negotiating meetings each year and organizes annual sessions of the so-called 'subsidiary bodies' (UNFCCC, n.d.).

The UNFCCC Secretariat is based in Bonn, Germany, and has approximately 450 staff members. When it was established in Rio de Janeiro as part of the UNFCCC, the Secretariat was conceived as a traditional treaty secretariat mainly in charge '[t]o make arrangements for sessions of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies established under the Convention and to provide them with services as required' (UNFCCC, 1992, Article 8(2)(a)). Supporting the COP meetings and their related negotiating processes remains a core function of the secretariat today, yet its mandate has clearly evolved over time. It now also serves as an expert bureaucracy on climate change and has key implementation tasks in terms of providing technical expertise and assisting in the analysis and review of information reported by member states under the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, such as the mentioned NDCs (UNFCCC, n.d.). The Secretariat also actively engages with non-party actors by supporting the 2016 Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action, regional Climate Weeks, and other events aimed at the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

The UNFCCC's leadership consists of the annually rotating Presidency of the COP, normally a senior official of the host country where the COP takes place, and the Executive Secretary leading the Secretariat. During the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement, the Executive Secretary was Patricia Espinosa (2016–2022). Espinosa had previously been a career diplomat in various multilateral forums and, as foreign minister of Mexico (2006–2012), she presided over the COP16 meeting in Cancun. While as Executive Secretary, Espinosa had a public-facing profile, she was less outspoken than her predecessor Christiana Figueres (2010–2016) (King, 2016), who Time Magazine once called a 'force for nature' (Redford, 2016). Espinosa's successor, Simon Stiell (2022–present), was previously minister for climate and energy in Grenada. The UNFCCC Executive Secretary is therefore typically someone at the ministerial level with a lot of previous experience with climate change governance.

4.1.2 The withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement

The first case study of this chapter examines the existential challenge to UNFCCC posed by U.S. President Trump in 2017. His announcement that the United States would withdraw from the Paris Agreement is an example of direct contestation by a powerful member state within an IO. As explained in Chapter 2, the support of powerful states is crucial to the effective functioning of IOs. This goes in particular for the United States, which has a central role as supporter of the institutional framework behind the liberal international order, but the participation of powerful states also contributes to the legitimacy and credibility of the global climate regime. The global effort against climate change stands and falls with the universal buy-in of states. With the United States withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, there was a serious risk that the Agreement would further unravel or prove ineffective at best. The direct contestation of the Trump administration thus threatened the proper functioning and long-term existence of the Paris Agreement and with it the broader UNFCCC-led climate regime.

As with the case of the WTO discussed in Chapter 3, the contestation of the Paris Agreement by the Trump administration had different aspects to it. On the one hand, Trump questioned climate change as such calling global warming a 'hoax' (Betsill, 2017; Bomberg, 2017). By extension, he thus actually questioned the need for climate change cooperation. At the same time, Trump stressed the costs involved in the Paris Agreement for the American economy and the uneven distribution of costs across countries. In his remarks announcing the U.S. withdrawal in June 2017, for instance, he noted that the Paris Agreement placed an 'unfair' economic burden on the US 'while imposing no meaningful obligations on the world's [other] leading polluters' (Trump, 2017). He added that the 'Paris Agreement handicaps the United States' economy in order to win praise from the very foreign capitals and global activists that have long sought to gain wealth at our country's expense' (Trump, 2017).

This dual challenge, against climate change as a cross-border problem that needs to be solved through international cooperation and against the costs involved in climate transition, was perceived in academic and public discourse alike as a threatening moment towards cooperation climate change and the UNFCCC (e.g. Pickering et al., 2018; Urpelainen & Van de Graaf, 2018; Zhang et al., 2017). With the United States bounded to withdraw under the Trump administration, many anticipated that 'the Paris deal was dead' (Bomberg, 2017, p. 961).

One of the greatest concerns in the climate community, after the contestation by Trump and the imminent U.S. withdrawal was the potential for *further* member withdrawal (Interview #B6). Especially following the withdrawal of an important country as the United States, which had been instrumental as a negotiator in the UNFCCC in the run-up to the Paris Agreement (Interview #B4) and remained one of the most influential powers in global climate governance, there was potentially no way of stopping a withdrawal cascade. Further member withdrawals from the Paris Agreement would have meant that states no longer regarded this Agreement to be the appropriate solution to climate change. This way, not only the legitimacy of the Paris Agreement but also the legitimacy of the UNFCCC itself would be questioned, as the Paris Agreement is the essential part of the UNFCCC's mandate.

The fears for further withdrawals were real, as there was precedent. The previous Kyoto Protocol of 1997 had notably not been ratified by the United States, and in its wake Australia, and the United States under the Bush administration had been hostile towards climate change action. Partially because the Kyoto Protocol did not cover the United States (and China), in 2010, Canada, Japan, and Russia opposed the Kyoto extension and Canada under the conservative Harper government withdrew in 2011 (*The Guardian,* *2011*). With respect to the Paris Agreement itself, the Brazilian presidential candidate Bolsonaro promised during his election campaign to follow the example of Trump. As president, Bolsonaro did not follow up, but he hardly ran climate-friendly policies and he did withdraw Brazil from the UN Global Compact for Migration. And even if other states would not formally withdraw from Paris, the risk with the U.S. withdrawal was also that other states would no longer take their own NDCs seriously. In addition, as one former UNFCCC official also remarked 'there [were] huge problems associated with the US not paying their contributions almost a quarter of the budget of the Secretariat' (Interview #B1). In other words, the U.S. withdrawal under Trump clearly put the Paris Agreement and its implementation at risk.

Importantly, the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement under Trump was not a surprise. The UNFCCC had obviously dealt with the previous conservative Bush administration and Trump had not been ambiguous about his objectives during his election campaign. When he was elected in November 2016, it was immediately clear to everyone in the UNFCCC and the climate community that U.S. withdrawal would follow. When Trump, as president, did announce the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in June 2017 (with the withdrawal only taking effect in November 2020), the UNFCCC was ready to respond.

4.1.3 UNFCCC's response to the U.S. withdrawal

With U.S. President Trump questioning climate change and taking aim at the 'unfair' distribution in costs of energy transition under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, the UNFCCC Secretariat and like-minded actors in the climate community had to develop a careful response strategy in preparation for the moment that Trump would withdraw from the Paris Agreement. The UNFCCC Secretariat made a number of strategic choices, in this respect, informed by its historical experience with the United States. First, it decided not to directly engage with the United States to prevent withdrawal which it considered inevitable. Trying to convince Trump was likely pointless and any sort of adaptation in response to Trump would risk the core mandate and climate objectives of the Paris Agreement. Instead, it focused on the secondary aim of preventing further withdrawals and eroding support for the climate change regime. Second, it approached the existential challenge indirectly by having other state and non-state actors criticize the Trump administration and to recommit other states to climate action by coming out strongly in favour of the Paris Agreement.

The UNFCCC response to the U.S. withdrawal is therefore positioned somewhere in between the WTO and World Bank case studies of Chapter 3. The response was clearly more proactive than in the case of the WTO, but it was also more circumvent than in the case of the World Bank. To comprehend the response by UNFCCC actors, it is important to carefully look at the comparative strengths of the UNFCCC Secretariat. While the UNFCCC is strongly embedded in an external network of climate change action supporters, because previous leaders helped to build such a network over time, the UNFCCC Secretariat is weaker when it comes to formal competences and an organizational structure that allows it to leverage all its resources. The UNFCCC has some leadership, but it is mostly geared towards the climate change community and the Executive Secretary was not going to change Trump's mind. In other words, the case study of the UNFCCC shows that the varying abilities of institutional actors within IOs affect responses chosen to existential challenges. Through a response of *discursive and behavioural resistance*, largely indirectly relying on the external network, the UNFCCC achieved a general recommitment to the Paris Agreement (see Table 4.1 for an overview of the findings).

It is worth starting with some of the inherent weaknesses of the UNFCCC institutional actors to better understand why they eventually developed and activated their external network. As noted already about, the *formal competences* of the UNFCCC Secretariat are fairly limited. The Secretariat was set

Table 4.1 Overview of empirical findings on UNFCCC and IEA

	UNFCCC	IEA
Existential challenge	United States withdraws from the Paris Agreement risking a cascade of further withdrawals	Establishment of IRENA seen as undermining the role of IEA as the key IO focused on energy
Institutional actors		
Leadership	Executive Secretary is a career diplomat	Executive Director was the IEA Chief Economist with twenty years of experience
Organizational structure	Treaty secretariat with an original focus on conference management, but also programme divisions	Treaty secretariat and expert bureaucracy with original focus on fossil fuels and oil emergency response system
Formal competences	Facilitate the COP meetings and act as a hub for information and expertise	Energy bureaucracy with focus on data and statistics, training, innovation, and international cooperation
External networks	Strong network with sub- and non-state actors in the United States developed after the failure of the Kyoto Protocol and Copenhagen Summit	Network built after 2015 with UNFCCC and IRENA, but also other IOs as well as G7 and G20
Institutional response	UNFCCC seeks to protect and insulate IOs by relying on the pre-existing external network with focus on resistance *(behavioural and discursive resistance)*	IEA adopts a role in climate change by layering it on top of its existing mandate and through public communication *(behavioural and discursive adaptation)*
Outcome	Withdrawal remains limited to the United States which rejoins under President Biden	IEA remains the focal institution in terms of energy

up with its main tasks to organize the COP meetings and to act as an information hub (Article 9 of the Convention; see also Busch, 2009; Depledge, 2005). It was thus a traditional treaty secretariat serving the parties. Along with these logics, the UNFCCC Secretariat also had for a long time an *organizational structure* that was set up to facilitate the function of conference management. Officials similarly tried to remain impartial, avoided initiative and agenda-setting, and steered away from proactive leadership to avoid stepping on the toes of the parties (Interviews #B1, #B5). Since the failed Copenhagen Summit of 2009, the Secretariat has developed considerably. Under the leadership of Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres (2010–2016), it adopted a much stronger entrepreneurial style prioritizing communication, networking, and

positioning itself as a central informational actor (Saerbeck et al., 2020; Well et al., 2020). The Secretariat now also has policy divisions and serves as a source of content expertise. Yet while it has become a more purposeful organization, the formal basis remains relatively weak.

In terms of *leadership*, it is worth noting that the UNFCCC Executive Secretary is relatively weak institutionally. The position is, first and foremost, to administer the UNFCCC Secretariat. For the COP meetings, where decision-making takes place, a separate President is appointed from the host country. The net result is that while UNFCCC Executive Secretaries are often skilled and long-standing members of the climate community, where they are well-connected, they have a more limited public profile. While her predecessor Christiana Figueres was perhaps an exception to this, Patricia Espinosa (2016–2022) was as noted a career diplomat, who did not for instance have access to the Oval Office (cf. NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg in Chapter 5). In terms of leadership, the ability of the UNFCCC to respond to Trump was thus limited to a competent running of the UNFCCC Secretariat but above all liaising with like-minded states and non-state actors in the external network of the UNFCCC.

Because of its internal institutional weaknesses, UNFCCC actors came to rely heavily on their extensive embeddedness in *external networks*. To understand this, it is important to provide some background. As mentioned, the UNFCCC responses were informed by and built on historical experience. The U.S. non-ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 was the UNFCCC's first experience of the United States challenging the UNFCCC and its efforts. Back in 2001, the U.S. government under George W. Bush receded from the Kyoto Protocol. This had been set up with the previous Clinton administration in 1998, but still needed to be ratified by the U.S. Senate (Pickering et al., 2018, p. 820). U.S. President George W. Bush formally rejected the protocol, which he considered 'fatally flawed' (as cited in Zelli, 2018, p. 177). The background for the 2001 non-ratification of the Kyoto Protocol differed in comparison with the Trump challenge in 2017. The main reasons were the absence of commitments for developing countries and excessively strong targets for the United States (Depledge, 2005), and the Kyoto Protocol was already doomed in the United States before it had been negotiated.

While they qualify the position of the U.S. Senate in the whole process, Jon Hovi, Detlef Sprinz, and Guri Bang (2012) note for instance that 'Kyoto's design gave it practically no chance of US Senate ratification' (p. 130). In July 1997, already before the Kyoto meeting, the U.S. Senate had passed the so-called 'Byrd–Hagel resolution' (ibid.), which stated that

the United States should not be a signatory to any protocol … which would (A) mandate new commitments to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions for the Annex I Parties, unless the protocol … also mandates new specific scheduled commitments … for Developing Country Parties within the same compliance period, or (B) result in serious harm to the economy of the United States.[1]

Once in office, President Bush pursued an anti-Kyoto policy. As Joanna Depledge (2005) shows, in March 2002, President Bush announced in a letter to Republican Senators that 'his campaign promise to control CO2 emissions had been a "mistake" and that he did not support the Kyoto Protocol targets. A couple of weeks later, the U.S. administration confirmed that it had "no interest in implementing" the Kyoto Protocol and that it was, therefore, "dead"' (p. 19). Without American ratification, the UNFCCC and supporting member states clearly worried about the potential failure of the Kyoto Protocol (Interview #B1). These concerns especially manifested when Australia under Prime Minister John Howard refrained from ratification as well (Pickering et al., 2018, p. 823) and when, as noted above, Canada withdrew. Although the Protocol still went into force in 2005, the years of U.S. nonparticipation were found to have weakened the Protocol's effectiveness and legitimacy (Pickering et al., 2018, p. 820). With the election of Trump in 2016, UNFCCC actors clearly understood that the new administration was 'not going to be extremely actively positive on acting on climate change' (Interview #B6). Indeed, UNFCCC staff uniformly agreed that the U.S. withdrawal from Paris was expected (Interviews #B1, #B5, #B8, #B11). The UNFCCC was, in a way, therefore prepared for dealing with the withdrawal announcement in 2017 (Interview #B2).

A difference between the U.S. withdrawal by the Trump administration and the non-ratification of the Kyoto Protocol under the Bush administration was the high non-state actor engagement of the UNFCCC. Since the Kyoto Protocol, the failed 2009 Copenhagen Summit, and especially with the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the UNFCCC had strengthened this engagement by developing external networks (Bäckstrand et al., 2017; Pickering et al., 2018, p. 822). The stronger involvement of non-state actors in climate action was largely the result of climate change becoming (obviously) more averse over time, but 'opening up' the UNFCCC process was also a conscious strategy pursued by UNFCCC actors. This way, also compared to the situation of the Kyoto Protocol, the UNFCCC could rely on the broader support for the Paris Agreement by a wider range of actors (Pickering et al.,

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[1] Senate Resolution 98. Congressional Record, Report No. 105-5412, June 1997.

2018, p. 822). Before, the Kyoto Protocol was set up as largely state centric and non-state actors were only included in the 'Clean Development Mechanism' in the role of implementing entities or financial intermediaries (Pickering et al., 2018, p. 823; see also Falkner, 2016; Hale, 2016; Lövbrand, Hjerpe, & Linnér, 2017).

Additionally, after the doomed Copenhagen Summit in 2009, the UNFCCC proactively took on an 'entrepreneurial' role despite its 'prohibitively strict mandate as a technocratic facilitator' (Well et al., 2020). It would act as a 'knowledge broker' and 'communication hub' for stakeholders (cf. Aykut et al., 2022; Well et al., 2020). Especially with the negotiations on the Paris Agreement in 2015, the UNFCCC and the UN Secretary-General in cooperation with the COP hosting governments of Peru (COP20, 2014) and France (COP21, 2015) orchestrated and expanded to sub- and non-state actors with the programmes, the Lima-Paris Action Agenda (LPAA), and the climate actions and pledges online tracker Nonstate Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA) (Falkner, 2016, p. 13). With LPAA, climate initiatives of over 10,000 commitments or actions by cities, companies, states, and others could be included (Falkner, 2016, p. 13). After 2015, the Paris Agreement now explicitly recognized non-state actors and gave them the possibility to join the UNFCCC processes, as they cannot formally join the Paris Agreement themselves (Pickering et al., 2018, p. 823, see also Bäckstrand & Kuyper, 2017). As Jonathan Kuyper, Björn-Ola Linnér, and Heike Schroeder (2018) put it in their research: '[T]he Paris Agreement cements an architecture of hybrid multilateralism that enables and constrains non-state actor participation in global climate governance' (p. 1).

The UNFCCC continuously enforced deeper engagement with non-state and sub-national actors. This way, the UNFCCC could reach beyond its state members, as it had built 'an open forum' of integrated non-state actors in the policy dialogue (Hickmann & Elsässer, 2020, p. 6). By orchestrating this 'open forum' the UNFCCC has successfully established itself as 'a manager and information hub, emerging as a co-leading institution, and taking on the role of a spearheading actor' of non-state actor engagement (Hickmann & Elsässer, 2020, p. 14; see also Chan, Balvanera, & Benessaiah, 2016; Falkner, 2016; Hale, 2016; Lövbrand et al., 2017). Through this, the UNFCCC could rely on the pre-existing external network with focus on resistance (*behavioural and discursive resistance*).

Following the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, for the UNFCCC it was a crucial task to not only 'uphold the positive spirit' (Interview #B4) but also the UNFCCC needed to justify and position itself juxtaposed to the Trump contestation. Several parameters were important in this respect. First,

the UNFCCC needed to consider the type of direct existential challenge. Trying to convince President Trump to stay engaged on climate action, through a range of adaptation strategies, was likely pointless and actually risked undermining the very mandate of the UNFCCC to tackle climate change. Any form of 'negotiation' with Trump would immediately trigger demands from the other parties to the Paris Agreement. Second, taking a strong public opposition, as other member states and sub-and non-state actors did after the U.S. announcement, was not an option for the UNFCCC either since the UNFCCC governance fora on global climate remain member state-driven. As one interviewee stated: 'I think the reaction from our side was more neutral because we tried to explain to them in our statements that, yes, even though the US wants to pull out, there are some rules in place, and you cannot just say you're leaving' (Interview #B5). Not accepting the United States' sovereign decision under the Paris Agreement had the potential of dissatisfying other member states with the organization. Instead, the UNFCCC itself had to remain relatively neutral (Interviews #B1, #B5), as the 'Secretariat had to be more restrained or more cautious in what it said about the U.S. withdrawal' (Interview #B1).

Significantly, the UNFCCC assessed the U.S. announcement in consultation with the UN Secretary-General in New York (Interviews #B1, #B2). This way, a coherent, appropriate response could be filed to reflect the importance of the United States in the Paris Agreement for acting on climate change but would moreover underline the position of the UNFCCC. Importantly, UNFCCC actors wanted to stress the rules of the orderly process of exiting the Paris Agreement, also communicating that the United States would remain in the Paris Agreement until 2020, and would still be part of the overall UNFCCC (Interviews #B5, #B6). The UNFCCC's calm response was thus informed by the exit rules included in the Paris Agreement itself. As one member of the UNFCCC Secretariat put it:

> So, the UN process and then the wide international community was saying very much the same things, that yes, the US if it wants to leave, of course there is a rule in the Paris Agreement, they can give notice. It doesn't have an immediate effect and the US were still formally a party to the Paris agreement. It still is today [May 2020] it will only be in November this year when the withdrawal legally takes effect. Until then they're still a party. (Interview #B6)

To clarify this point, Article 28 of the Paris Agreement regulates the exit process. It states that members can 'at any time after three years from the date on which this Agreement has entered into force … withdraw from this

Agreement by giving written notification to the Depositary', and that it 'shall take effect upon expiry of one year from the date of receipt by the Depositary of the notification of withdrawal' (UNFCCC, 2017a). In other words, the United States could not instantly withdraw from the Paris Agreement, as the Agreement had only entered into force in November 2016. This meant that notifications could only be filed in November 2019, which was still almost 2.5 years after Trump announced his intention to withdraw (June 2017). In its statement, the UNFCCC made clear that the renegotiation of the Paris Agreement is generally possible 'considering the modalities for the US participation' but 'not to the request of one country' (UNFCCC, 2017b). It also underlined that '[t]he Paris Agreement remains a historic treaty signed by 195 Parties and ratified by 146 countries plus the European Union. Therefore, it cannot be renegotiated based on the request of a single Party' (ibid.). One interviewee stressed that this implied that the United States was welcome to 'come back any time if they decide to change their position' (Interview #B5).

Beyond the initial response to the announcement of the Trump administration to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the UNFCCC international actors tried to continue to keep constructive contact with the U.S. federal government, but equally also enforced engagement with U.S. non-state actors (Interview #B9). Precisely because it had set up a wider non-state actor network, the UNFCCC had grounds for the 'engagement with many actors from the US' (Interview #B6). 'Confidence grew' in the UNFCCC, when actors outside the U.S. federal government took over to continuously promote acting collectively on climate change nationally as well as internationally (Interviews #B1, #B6). For example, in 2016, even before his inauguration, mayors from the so-called 'Climate Action Mayors' signed an open letter to President-elect Trump. They stated that:

> As Mayors, we have taken it upon ourselves to take bold action within our cities to tackle the climate crisis head-on. We write today to ask for your partnership in our work to clean our air, strengthen our economy, and ensure that our children inherit a nation healthier and better prepared for the future than it is today. … And we ask that you shift to embrace the Paris Climate Agreement and make U.S. cities your partner in doing so. While we are prepared to forge ahead even in the absence of federal support, we know that if we stand united on this issue, we can make change that will resonate for generations. We have no choice and no room to doubt our resolve. The time for bold leadership and action is now. (Climate Mayors, 2016)

Along the same lines, in 2017, several U.S. corporations, including for example Apple, Google, Unilever, and others issued full-page ads in *The*

New York Times, *The New York Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* (Bestill, 2017, p. 190). Beyond this, the Paris Agreement and its implementation were continuously supported by some U.S. states contrary to the position of the federal government. As one former UNFCCC official stated 'we had really good examples of states, California, New York, etc. who were very much in the front lines in promoting climate action, and also a number of companies, but most famously there was Michael Bloomberg and the Bloomberg foundation' (Interview #B1). These states including for example California, New York, and Washington, represent almost two-thirds of the United States' gross domestic product. Further, California and New York both committed to the use of renewable energy and to supply 50% of the state's electricity through renewables by 2030 (Bomberg, 2017, p. 960).

Another significant example of opposing sub-state actor engagement is the 'Global Climate Action Summit' that was also initiated by Californian Governor Jerry Brown in September 2018. The summit gathered local, sub-state actors, and several non-state actors, again including big U.S. corporations, to address climate change and the continued support for the Paris Agreement and engaging in climate action (Interview #B11). The goal was to take 'ambition to the next level with a wave of fresh and brave climate action announcements that, if implemented would generate over 65 million new, low-carbon jobs by 2030' (UNFCCC, 2018). By having U.S. sub-state governments and a major part of the U.S. economy still committed to the Paris Agreement, this commitment sent a strong message, despite risking possible tensions with the federal government by taking opposition (Interviews #B4, #B6).

In terms of immediate administrative needs, the U.S. withdrawal also put the UNFCCC in financial problems and its external network helped here as well. As one interviewee stated 'there [were] huge problems associated with the US not paying their contributions almost a quarter of the budget of the Secretariat. So, they [the UNFCCC Secretariat] had to remobilize to find sources of funding and reduce expenditures. But I think, they got through that not too badly actually. And the Bloomberg money has definitely helped to take the sting out of that as well' (Interview #B1). The coalition of 'America's pledge' initiated by the Bloomberg Foundation and the Governor of California aimed to prevent the UNFCCC from long-term financial issues and to further promote climate change action. Here, Bloomberg offered not only to pay parts of the contributions of the U.S. share of the budget, indicating that the UNFCCC could continue its agenda with the Paris Agreement despite the U.S. withdrawal (Interview #B1), but also through this

coalition kept meeting the targets of the climate change agenda within the Paris Agreement (Hermwille, 2018, p. 458).

In addition to 'America's pledge', another movement was 'We're still in' (Bestill, 2017, p. 190; Interviews #B1, #B4, #B6, #B13). From June 2017, more than 3800 leaders from America's city halls, state houses, boardrooms, and college campuses, representing more than 155 million Americans and $9 trillion of the U.S. economy have signed its declaration. This movement collectively opposed the U.S. government's decision, calling the U.S. withdrawal 'out of step with what is happening in the United States' and declaring that they 'will continue to support climate action to meet the Paris Agreement' (Bestill, 2017, p. 190).

The domestic U.S. opposition to Trump's policies on climate change largely activated itself, but this was replicated internationally. In contrast to the expectations of a domino effect of further member withdrawal, a positive, re-commitment to the Paris Agreement could be observed (Interview #B6). Indeed, many countries actively stated their commitment to the Paris Agreement and intention to its continued implementation. As one UNFCCC negotiator emphasized:

> We saw many countries making very active statements of their intention to continue implementing the Paris agreement, to continue the action … So, we had this quite strong movement—we saw it at the European level, we saw it for China, we saw it with a number of other key players and there were obviously quite a lot of contacts for the time to ensure that those messages were heard. (Interview #B6)

Germany, Italy, and France put out a joint statement, saying 'the momentum generated in Paris in December 2015 irreversible, and we firmly believe that the Paris Agreement cannot be renegotiated, since it is a vital instrument for our planet, societies and economies' (as cited in Politico, 2017). Likewise, the European Commissioner has stated that the EU was 'ready to lead the fight' (as cited in Bomberg, 2017, p. 962). Also, for example, Germany announced to double its contribution, which led to other European countries strengthening their commitment to the Paris Agreement, and thus to the UNFCCC (Interview #B9). Further, China's President Xi Jinping claimed to 'take a leadership role' and contribute to climate action, however, 'as long as the diplomatic, economic and domestic environmental opportunities presented by such action remain' (as cited in Bomberg, 2017, p. 962). Shortly after the announcement, the Chinese president, for the first time in Chinese history, agreed to a bilateral agreement with a sub-national actor, declaring to 'boost cooperation on green technology' in cooperation with the Californian Governor Brown (Hermwille, 2018, p. 458).

This vast support by member states, sub-, and non-state actors, stemmed not only from the necessity to continue collective action under the Paris Agreement but moreover as mentioned earlier from the UNFCCC's previous efforts in taking on a more proactive role as 'knowledge broker' and 'communication hub' (Well et al., 2020) with the LPAA and NAZCA climate initiatives (Falkner, 2016, p. 13). This way, the UNFCCC was vital in establishing a network before the Trump contestation. The UNFCCC thus encourages initiatives, supports initiatives that further favoured goals (e.g. the LPAA), and promotes coordination among the variety of multiple stakeholders and facilitates coordination among them (van Asselt & Zelli, 2018, pp. 203–204). As one UNFCCC negotiator stated, the UNFCCC

> is a critical path I believe of what we need to track on climate change and certainly in maintaining that space, [so] having a space in which parties can reach agreements and the rules but also ensure the transparency, the tracking of action, the different pieces we need to maintain a minimum of mutual trust and confidence in a collective and individual action to implement the convention and now the Paris agreement is obviously vital … It's the collective space in many ways that is most valuable. (Interview #B6)

This 'space' is also maintained by the UNFCCC through the facilitation of the yearly COPs, where the room for presenting and connecting multiple actors is expanded year after year, for example, in the COPs pavilions and the so-called 'Climate Action Hub' (Aykut et al., 2022, p. 180). The UNFCCC 'allows for full capture of the new complexity of a polycentric climate governance regime, in which a variety of agents participate in implementing governance goals but also in shaping the new regime' (Aykut et al., 2022). Hence, when the Trump administration announced to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the UNFCCC had an established network in the first place and orchestrated support to keep the climate change momentum going, not only through multiple initiatives but also by expanding the space, especially at the COP meetings.

When summing up the response of UNFCCC institutional actors to the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement under Trump, it is clear that it is a case of behavioural and discursive resistance. While there was some accommodating language from the UNFCCC on continuing to work with the U.S. government, and some attempt at depoliticization with regard to the legal modalities of withdrawal, it is clear that the UNFCCC focused on keeping its core mandate of climate action and its targets set by the Paris Agreement alive. At the same time, the case study shows that the response by UNFCCC

actors was largely indirect with the external network stepping in and opposing Trump. This external network had been built since the days of Kyoto and Copenhagen and was now put to use. It not only contributed to the delegitimation of Trump's position but also to other member states and many non-state actors recommitting to the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC process. This outcome will be discussed in Section 4.1.4.

4.1.4 The outcome of the challenge to the Paris Agreement

As shown in this chapter, the UNFCCC has come a long way since 2001 after the U.S. non-ratification of the Kyoto Protocol that in fact undermined and delegitimized the regime. Over time, the UNFCCC has built up more experienced leadership and a clearer and more directive organizational structure and culture with its 450 staff members, which enables the UNFCCC actors as experts to facilitate and support global negotiation and cooperation on climate change beyond its member states. Most importantly, however, it has built a strong external network in order to respond both discursively and behavioural focusing on resistance in 2017. This way, the external network was the major contributor to support the UNFCCC's response to the withdrawal announcement.

While UNFCCC actors initially feared a cascade of further state withdrawals from the Paris Agreement, not a single other member state quit. Domestic implementation of the NDCs and energy transition has left something to be desired (and collective international action is generally falling short of what is required to address climate change), but the Paris Agreement survived the Trump administration. The United States formally withdrew from the Paris Agreement on 4 November 2020; the incoming Biden administration rejoined the agreement on 20 January 2021, on President Biden's very first day in office. While four years of Trump clearly affected the fight against climate change, as in delayed action, it is telling that climate change had become an issue of domestic politics in the United States, with support for climate action running through the different layers of government and society.

Importantly, the process of domestic relegitimation of climate action went in parallel with the effort of international relegitimation and recommitment. The Paris Agreement is the focal agreement for climate action, now even more so than when it first entered into force in 2016. Various climate-minded states, in Europe but also notably China, put political capital on the line to stress the importance of the Paris Agreement. It was equally supported by the

extensive network of non-state actors. This outcome cannot be fully ascribed to UNFCCC institutional actors. As noted above, many of the U.S. domestic actors, climate-minded states and non-state actors spontaneously provided support for the Paris Agreement. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the UNFCCC Secretariat has proactively worked on building up such an external network and making climate action something much more than a purely intergovernmental process run by state governments. This 'opening up' after Kyoto and Copenhagen by the UNFCCC has been a significant development.

4.2 IEA and the creation of IRENA

4.2.1 The IEA and its main functions

With the Yom Kippur War in 1973, several Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members cut their oil production and initiated an oil embargo on Israel-supporting countries (IEA, n.d. [a]; see also Türk, 2016). The following first oil crisis 'exposed the vulnerability of industrialised countries to dependency on oil imports' (IEA, n.d. [a]), leading to a severe oil shortage, years of inflation, and economic stagnation. In order to find ways to mitigate this strong dependency on the oil exporting countries, sixteen countries founded the IEA. Established as an energy security organization within the OECD framework in 1974, the IEA was to watch over the member countries' independence from the oil-producing countries (Türk, 2016; Van de Graaf, 2012). Since the OECD was the focal economic organization of the industrialized market economies, responsible for 'virtually all economic questions', it was deemed obvious that 'energy questions, of course, fell clearly within the Organisation's mandate' (Scott, 1994, p. 34). Yet since the OECD itself 'was not at that time equipped to deal promptly with the types of problems presented by the crisis' (Scott, 1994, p. 33), there was a need for an additional autonomous agency. As a result, the OECD provided the framework to establish the IEA to speak to industrial countries' energy organization needs.

In case of a new oil embargo, the IEA's key instrument is the emergency oil response system, which includes oil supplies within the member states that will last at least for a period of ninety days (Frøland & Ingulstad, 2020). The IEA aims to ensure and monitor the compliance of its member states to this response system. Further, with the IEA framework, member states

agreed to the solidarity of oil-sharing among them, and to develop an updated national oil security legislation, including regulations and a crisis response plan (IEA, 1974, 2018). The agency provided the framework for their member states and the link between the OECD countries to react to other future oil crises.

Today, the IEA has thirty-one member states (IEA, n.d. [b]) and approximately 250 staff members. Besides holding the high-level Governing Board at the ministerial level every two years, the IEA organizes the Governing Board at the director-general level at least four times per year. In addition, the IEA consists of a range of standing groups and committees, with representatives of member states, dealing with files of a more technical nature. Further, the IEA holds a different range of programmes (IEA, n.d. [c]) and sets the goal to foster 'co-operation among all energy market participants, helps to improve information and understanding, and encourages the development of efficient, environmentally acceptable and flexible energy systems and markets worldwide' (IEA, 1993). The IEA is, in this respect, a focal institution at the centre of the global energy regime. It cooperates therefore also with a wide range of other IOs and international institutions in the field of energy (IEA, n.d. [d]). In other words, the IEA has developed as an important centre of expertise around energy questions.

However, cross-border cooperation problems and power constellations between states in the international system changed considerably since the founding of the IEA. Two stand out. First, with the emergence of climate change as a core international cooperation problem, the traditional focus of the IEA on oil and fossil fuels and its lack of attention to new energy sources presented an increasing misfit (Van de Graaf, 2012, p. 234). Second, the emerging powers, including particularly China, became major energy consumers over the decades and they were not represented in the IEA. The IEA was not able to keep up with the changing reality of the global landscape of emerging powers of the Global South as well as the demand for energy transition. These issues turned into an existential challenge for the IEA with the creation of the competitor institution IRENA, which will be discussed in Section 4.2.2.

4.2.2 The creation of IRENA for renewable energy

With its exclusive membership and narrow focus on oil, the IEA has long been criticized as 'conservative', 'ineffective', and 'blind' by scholars analysing

the IEA's purpose and existence (Carrington & Stephenson, 2018; Downie, 2020; Faude & Fuss, 2020; Florini, 2010; Heubaum & Biermann, 2015; Van de Graaf & Lesage, 2009; Van de Graaf, 2012, 2013). The criticism over this imbalance and rather 'biased or unfair procedures' has increased over the years (Zelli, 2018, p. 178). Although the IEA's founding rationale was to ensure oil-security, the IEA's continued insistence on oil, resistance to incorporate other energy resources in its mandate, and exclusion of countries decreasingly reflected the IEA's aspired 'global role its name implies' (Van de Graaf, 2012, p. 237).

Importantly, the problem with the IEA was not just being the misfit to a changing international environment, but also its inability to respond to changing demands. As Jeff Colgan, Robert Keohane, and Thijs van de Graaf (2012) note, the IEA seemed to be 'structurally frozen in time' (p. 126). While renewable energy had been on the international agenda since the 1980s, the IEA simply was not responsive well into the 2000s. A key advocate for renewable energy, the then-member of the German Parliament, Hermann Scheer, for example, criticized the IEA for leaving 'no stone unturned when it comes to emphasizing the long-term indispensability of nuclear and fossil energy' (Scheer, 2007, p. 174; see also Van de Graaf, 2012, p. 237). From this perspective, advocates for renewable energy perceived the IEA as not the 'appropriate venue for reform at the time' (Van de Graaf & Lesage, 2009, p. 303; Van de Graaf, 2012). By the mid-2000s, particularly in the context of the 2004 Bonn International Renewable Energy Conference, it was thus felt that 'for renewable energy, there is no international governmental organization that focuses on the global mobilization of renewable energy in a way that is increasingly urgent' (Scheer, 2008).

The IEA was also criticized for its exclusive 'club' membership of OECD countries only. As one interviewee stated, 'developing countries felt they were not members of IEA', which was also causing 'blockages' in other multilateral forums, such as the UNFCCC, that also relied on exchanging information with the IEA (Interview #B28). For example, in 2010, China accused the latest IEA estimates 'not very credible' as the IEA has 'lack of knowledge about China, especially about China's latest developments of energy conservation and renewable energy' (Hook, 2010). This way, this non-universal frame meant a neglect of including rising powers, such as India and China, that have heavily increased their energy consumption over time (Van de Graaf, 2012, 2013). The OECD membership only remained a pressing point of criticism, due to the changing reality of global power structures and energy consumption. At the same time, IEA member countries were 'concerned with … China's foray into the African oil business' (Van de Graaf, 2012, p. 234). This

was a concern for the IEA as it meant a realistic loss of influence on global energy markets (Van de Graaf, 2012, p. 235; see also Carrington & Stephenson, 2018; Downie, 2020; Faude & Fuss, 2020; Florini, 2010; Heubaum & Biermann, 2015; Overland & Reischl, 2018).

Neglecting the inclusion of rising powers, which have heavily increased their energy consumption, denied access to their energy data, and cooperation with these non-OECD countries. Further, the risk of being outrun by these emerging powers increased. Missing out on diplomatic ties and data access to these countries was crucial since it made holistic diagnosis and prospects of the world's energy consumption impossible. In fact, 'all of the additional energy-related CO_2 emissions [by] 2030 are expected to come from countries outside of the IEA' (Van de Graaf, 2012, p. 235).

At the invitation of the German government, and with the strong backing of Denmark and Spain (three IEA members), representatives of sixty governments met in Berlin in April 2008 for the Preparatory Conference for the Foundation of IRENA (German Federal Government, 2008). This eventually led to the IRENA Founding Conference in Bonn in January 2009 where seventy-five states signed the IRENA Statute. The Statute mandated IRENA to 'promote the widespread and increased adoption and the sustainable use of all forms of renewable energy' (Article II) and noted that IRENA's membership is 'open to those States that are members of the United States' and regional organizations (notably the EU). The Statute entered into force in 2010. By the new year, IRENA was fully established with a headquarters in Abu Dhabi, which also reflected the potentially universal membership.

IRENA was explicitly established as a counterweight to the IEA (Faude & Fuss, 2020; Overland & Reischl, 2018, p. 337). There was the clear potential that this would affect the central position of the IEA in the broader energy regime. Having explicitly set up IRENA as a competitor organization, sent a clear message of perceived incompetence and mistrust in the IEA's abilities by the three involved member states. This was further underlined in 2009 when the IEA was accused of 'inappropriate portrayals of the energy scene' by civil society (Florini, 2010, p. 46). At the time, the IEA World Energy Outlook 2009 was negatively assessed by a group of Swedish scientists. In addition to this, a whistleblowing incident by IEA staff members, which appeared in news reports, accused the IEA of 'deliberately downplay[ing] the rate of oil production from existing oilfields and overplayed the chances of finding new reserves due to US pressure' (Florini, 2010, p. 47). All this added up to the creation of IRENA. Its purpose was not just to be a new renewable energy IO but also to potentially replace the IEA in the future. Through IRENA, the

IEA's authority in the energy field was crucially undermined and resulted in an existential crisis.

While the existential challenge was clear, it took a while for the IEA to respond. Only with the arrival of Fatih Birol as the new Executive Director in 2015, the IEA started adapting by including energy transition and climate change much more prominently in its activities. Relevant was also the adoption of the Paris Agreement a couple of months later, which served as a catalyst for reform, with climate action taking further centre stage on the international political agenda. The IEA was slow to respond to the creation of IRENA, but eventually strategically addressed the two main issues of the existential challenge: The OECD exclusive membership and the neglect of renewable energy. The different parts of the IEA's responses will be discussed in Section 4.2.3.

4.2.3   The IEA's response to the creation of IRENA

The IEA's response to the creation of IRENA can be best described as *discursive and behavioural adaptation* (see Table 4.1 for an overview of findings). The IEA engaged in discursive adaption by framing, prioritizing, and politicizing the need for adaptation. Internally, the IEA placated its challenger member states and adopted joint communications with competing IOs. Externally, IEA leadership stepped forward by being vocal and present regarding the necessity for climate action. On a behavioural level, the IEA facilitated compromise between the member states, keeping the original characteristics of the organization central yet adding new layers, through the association of non-OECD countries and inclusion of renewables in the mandate. Internally, the IEA hired new staff with expertise in renewable energy, while externally the IEA developed synergies with its competitor IRENA and expanded its network and cooperation on energy and climate change. Through such discursive and behavioural adaptation, the IEA could justify and reposition itself as the focal institution in the energy field and protect itself. While this strategic response was substantial, it did take IEA some time to react. It required the *leadership* of the new Executive Director Fatih Birol in 2015 with the parallel adoption of the Paris Agreement (under the UNFCCC) serving as a catalyst for the climate action agenda.

The IEA Secretariat, which includes the Executive Director and their staff, traditionally has the dual role of implementing the 1974 Agreement on International Energy Program (as amended in 2022) and servicing the

Governing Board.[2] As such, they can be considered an expert bureaucracy and a treaty secretariat. In terms of *leadership*, some considerable amount of discretion was given to the Executive Director including to direct the work of the officials in the Secretariat and transform concepts and member states instructions into actionable policies pursued by the Secretariat (IEA, n.d. [a]). The Secretariat itself thus has a clear and identifiable *organizational structure*, with several policy directorates, and also has some strong *formal competences* on a number of specific issues, as defined in the International Energy Program (IEA, 1974, p. 241). This presents at the same time precisely the problem: While there is clear discretion for the Executive Director and the Secretariat of the IEA, they have to operate within the bounds of the International Energy Program. Equally, while the IEA was from the start closely connected to the OECD (co-located for a long time on the OECD premises), its broader *external network* was limited.

As said, it took a while for the IEA to respond and implement new strategies. It was itself not responsive to the demands of climate change and the inclusion of the emerging powers, yet also after the establishment of IRENA in 2009, the IEA did not immediately respond. Although the then-Executive Director Maria van der Hoeven was part of the process from 2013 towards the association of countries of non-OECD countries, and she warned countries of their 'addiction to fossil fuels' (Heubaum & Biermann, 2015, p. 234), she was less enthusiastic about adapting the IEA mandate on the issue of climate change (Interview #B28). The initial non-response by the IEA, and the behaviour of the Executive Director in this, was surprising given that climate change had been one of the crucial topics and reasons to establish the competitor IRENA. The IEA ultimately initiated a modernization process to embrace and overcome these challenges (Heubaum & Biermann, 2015). The momentum came especially with the appointment of Birol in 2015, who was considered a vocal climate advocate (Heubaum & Biermann, 2015). Birol, while an IEA insider, also had special connections to emerging powers like India and China (Interviews #B28, #B29, #B30, #B31, #B32, #B33). In turn, the IEA pursued a strategy of adaptation towards renewable energy sources and energy transition by incorporating renewable energy expertise in different ways.

The IEA structured its modernization under three pillars: energy security in the 21st century; its 'opening the doors' policy for emerging countries;

[2] The founding Council Decision refers to the 'secretariat' (Article 7) with the governing body being the intergovernmental organ of the IEA. When we refer to the 'IEA' we refer to the agency/secretariat.

and clean energy transition. Several interviewees reflected on this modern-ization strategy that there has been a 'cultural change', in which the IEA shifted to reflect the emerging reality of climate change, moving away from fossil fuels only (Interviews #B28, #B33). To succeed in this change, and to be able to deliver this expertise, the IEA expanded its staff in all divisions except oil (Heubaum & Biermann, 2015; Interview #B35). The division on renewable energy rose from five to twenty plus staff members (Interview #B35). In other words, the IEA added an additional layer to its existing struc-ture thereby being responsive to the challenge of its own member states on renewables. In 2015, Harald Heubaum and Frank Biermann observed this 'high staff turnover' in their research that brought in an 'in house expertise' of younger experts that have been more exposed to the connection of climate policies and energy policymaking (2015, p. 233). Also, to have more expertise exchange the IEA and IRENA established an official partnership agreement in 2012 (Heubaum & Biermann, 2015, p. 234); they intensified their recip-rocal relationship, engaging in workshops and technology briefs. The IEA and IRENA also have a joint database of renewable energy policies and mea-sures. Therefore, just as we saw with the case of the AIIB and World Bank in Chapter 3, the incumbent adapted and reached out.

Executive Director Fatih Birol played a special role since his appointment in 2015 (Interviews #B28, #B29). He was no stranger to the IEA mem-bers, as he had previously been working at the IEA as chief economist and was known to be very 'knowledgeable' (Interview #B35). His approach was markedly different from his predecessor with a strong discursive pub-lic engagement on social media, speaking out for working towards energy transition and acting on climate change. As an instance of discursive adaptation, he has been presenting the IEA's expertise as an essential component for climate action and underlining the need for the IEA to engage in international cooperation beyond the OECD members (Interviews #B28, #B29, #B30, #B31, #B32, #B33). He also emphasized the coopera-tion with other IOs in the climate regime, for example, with the IRENA and the UNFCCC to exchange expertise (Heubaum & Biermann, 2015; Interview #B28).

This was not just a discursive response by the Executive Director but also turned into an actual behavioural one. To address the existential challenge, the IEA started to enforce a stronger external network and close cooper-ation with other IOs, besides IRENA, to exchange expertise. Through the cooperation with the UNFCCC, the IEA moved towards climate action. The IEA benefits from the UNFCCC expertise on climate change, espe-cially in regard to CO_2 emission and the so-called 'carbon budget' it assesses,

which the IEA needs to incorporate into their analysis (Interview #B35). When the IEA started its modernization, the UNFCCC also started to benefit from the IEA as a 'valuable partner' in assisting and advising on technological and analytical questions. Especially when constructing the Paris Agreement, the IEA assisted the UNFCCC as a technical expert (Interview #B28). The IEA contributed 'intellectual backing to informal work' and gave 'technical solutions', and continued to do so beyond 2015 (Interview #B28).

The IEA has also developed its presence in formal political fora, such as the G7 and Group of 20 (G20) (Interviews #B31, #B32, #B33), being consulted for energy-related issues. Further, on regional levels, the IEA also works with organizations such as the ADB, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, and the African Union (AU) to promote regional energy cooperation (IEA, 2023). By enforcing this strong presence in the broader external network, the IEA repositions itself as the focal institution in the energy field and is an ally to the climate action agenda rather than an obstacle with its focus on fossil fuels.

The second challenge to the IEA was related to its exclusive membership. To remain a relevant institution of energy, the IEA needed to adapt beyond its OECD-only members. The reality of emerging powers in world politics, such as China or India that are not only major energy consumers but also big greenhouse emitters, and to make governing more sustainable, demands their acknowledgement and participation in the global energy discourse and decision-making. Making such emerging powers full members of the IEA is, however, challenging and remains a returning point of discussion (Interview #B33). Full membership by non-OECD countries would, for instance, require changing the legal framework and a renewed ratification by the member states, which is regarded as the opening of a 'Pandora's box' as with this legal change other demands for change, for instance, change in binding commitment to energy goals or the emergency oil response system, might come to the forefront (Interview #B33). Therefore, instead of full membership, the IEA has for now focused on associate membership for such non-OECD countries.

Discussions about how to include non-OECD members as associate members have been an issue for over ten years. As one interviewee notes, 'role of the Western, of the OECD countries in the energy world has been shrinking for decades, so it's important to have a prominent organization which more or less represents or at least counts to its family much more countries than only OECD countries' (Interview #B32; also #B28, #B35). Further, the IEA

has a special interest in having not only a conversation with these other high energy consumers, such as China and India, but also impact and control, in regard to its core competence of the emergency oil response system. Here, the IEA and its members face the dilemma of the global impact of possible oil crises.

This dilemma became increasingly pressing with the creation of IRENA, which was created to be open to universal membership. IEA leadership then started adapting on a behavioural and discursive level. The leadership facilitated a compromise with the member states and by prioritizing the need for adaptation, suggested the association of non-OECD countries. IEA leadership, first with Maria van der Hoeven in 2013 and then with Fatih Birol from 2015 established and introduced the so-called 'association countries' and the mentioned 'opening the door' policy to deepen the collaboration with eight associated countries. This attempt of association was already initiated at the 2013 Ministerial Meeting with the Joint Declaration by the IEA and Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, and South Africa expressing mutual interest in pursuing an association (IEA, 2013). Here, besides the twenty-eight IEA members to that date, and more than thirty industry leaders from the IEA Energy Business Council, which included top companies active in energy or closely related fields, the now associated countries attended the meeting (IEA, 2013). Outlining the original ambitions, the association of non-OECD countries should provide

> an efficient, voluntary means to work together on areas of mutual interest, including: increased information-sharing on common energy challenges and best practices; energy security; transparency and analysis of energy markets; energy technologies; energy efficiency and renewable energy. Association would also provide a common forum for regular dialogue between IEA member and partner countries via participation of partner countries in meetings of various IEA Standing Groups and Committees as well as this and future Ministerial Meetings. (IEA, 2013)

In 2015, Executive Director Fatih Birol played a special role in the finalization of this association. When he was elected in 2015, he had made calls before to the IEA members about his agenda to finally 'opening the door' to non-OECD countries (Interview #B35). This then 'was not something that has surprised our member countries' (Interview #B35). When appointed in September, he emphasized this aspiration even more, by not following the regular protocol of visiting the United States or Japan first after his election but to go to China (Interview #B35). At the 2015 Ministerial meeting in November, the association was finalized with the 'Joint

Ministerial Declaration … expressing the Activation of Association' (IEA, 2015). With this 'open door' policy the IEA seeks to deepen its collaboration with the eight associated countries, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Thailand, Singapore, and South Africa, so now the 'IEA family … represents about 75% of global energy consumption, up from 40% in 2015' (Birol, 2017).

In 2017, after the association of India was ratified by the Indian government and the IEA 'as a major milestone in the development of global energy governance, and another major step toward the IEA becoming a truly global energy organization' (IEA, 2017). Birol underlined the importance of the member association for the IEA 'family':

> It's a very important development in global energy governance. It is now impossible to talk about the future of global energy markets without talking about India. … It is emerging as a major driving force in global energy trends with all modern fuels and technologies playing a part. India's new institutional ties with the IEA, marked a critical addition to the IEA global outreach to our open door policy. … With India joining the family means that the IEA is now more global, much stronger and much more representative. (Birol, 2017)

In the same year, China and the IEA signed a 'three-year work programme' to 'deepen ties', step up 'cooperation on energy security, capacity building, data and statistics', and 'expand their collaboration on a variety of key energy sector issues, including oil emergency management and preparedness, natural gas infrastructure, grid integration of variable renewables, energy efficiency, and technology innovation' (IEA, 2017).

Birol is regarded as the main figure to be able to reach out and effectively realize this cooperation with the non-OECD countries (Interview #B35). In fact, due to his outreach and vision of fortifying global cooperation on energy and interconnected climate issues, he was selected as one of the most hundred influential people by *Time Magazine* (Kerry, 2021). His recognition and close ties with non-OECD countries are also visible in the outreach by countries such as India, China, Indonesia, and Colombia that have asked him and in turn the IEA to chart road maps to speed climate action and reach net-zero emissions in 2021. His symbolic language refers to IEA cooperation with members and associated countries as 'family' and his strong outreach spans across the different varieties of responses after the existential challenge in 2009. These can be counted as discursive adaption by framing and prioritizing the adaptation. But the IEA was also able to justify and position itself as the focal institution in the energy field and build resilience to protect and insulate the IO.

4.2.4 Outcome of the challenge to the IEA

The IEA faced with a severe, existential challenge when three of its own member states initiated the competing institution IRENA in 2009. Denmark, Germany, and Spain were dissatisfied with the IEA's ability to address the reality of climate change and changing power structures in the international system. While the challenge was clear, particularly as IRENA was created and got off the ground, it took a while for the IEA to respond. Especially, with the arrival of the new Executive Director Fatih Birol in 2015 the IEA engaged in a vast adaption strategy by adding renewable energy, energy transition, and the association of non-OECD countries to their portfolio. This way, the IEA started to pay increasing attention to climate change through its layering strategy. The IEA could transform in response to the creation of IRENA and regain its relevance in the energy field. However, the IEA did not entirely discard its *raison d'être* energy security organization. The IEA kept its emergency oil response system and its exclusive full membership for OECD countries only. The IEA's responses can be best described as discursive and behavioural adaptation.

More than ten years after IRENA's creation, and through the start of the modernization in 2015, the IEA is widely perceived for its expertise (Interviews #B30, #B31, #B32, #B33, #B33). It shifted from an 'oil piling organization to a general energy organization and really a think tank' (Interview #B32). In embracing diverse energy expertise, one interviewee notes

> [The IEA guides] research on specific issues, day to day business is being done within the agency, so the experts of the agency do modelling, the experts of the agency gather data and make analysis, it helps experts in their discussion … [S]econd one is that to change from an oil and energy security organisation into a more general energy think tank, is that to move on the discussion in the 70s about oil security through gas security and now more and more about [member states] and energy and how to live up to the goals of the Paris agreement. … so, they're helping administrations, they're helping governments, they're helping businesses in their daily practice. (Interview #B30)

After the successful response, today, the IEA is perceived as an expert in giving out 'undisputed high quality of the data, the in-depth reviews [and] thematic reviews' (Interview #B31) and 'the world's most authoritative and comprehensive source of global energy data'. It is seen as 'a valuable partner one which is clearly extremely well placed in the global system because

climate policy in the end requires fundamental transformation of energy systems and … that expertise they have, has been valuable' (Interview #B28). Through this, the IEA was also able to position itself again over IRENA. Although being established as a direct counterweight to the IEA, as one interviewee stated, IRENA

> had a slightly difficult phase of getting … up to speed and getting relevance over the years … The IEA had the advantage of having an established organization established networks and … IRENA had to develop that and build it up and it's struggled a bit as well over the years with its management culture. (Interview #B28)

The IEA has repositioned itself in the international energy regime, by being more attentive to renewables and climate action. Through its 'opening the door' policy and its association with several major energy consumers as well as its expanded network with other IOs, it has regained relevance.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter with case studies on climate and energy is the second empirical chapter of the book. As with Chapter 3, it has studied one case study of an existential challenge to an IO posed by a direct challenge coming from a powerful state, in this case, the withdrawal of the United States under the Trump administration from the Paris Agreement (see Table 4.1 for an overview of the findings). It has also provided a case study of an indirect existential challenge where member states establish a competing institution, in this chapter the creation of IRENA challenging the IEA.

The case study on the Paris Agreement has focused on the behavioural resistance of the UNFCCC Secretariat following the withdrawal by the United States under Trump. It has particularly highlighted the importance of the massive external network that the UNFCCC helped to build around climate action. This was a lesson learned from the previous experience with the non-ratification of the Kyoto Protocol by the United States and the failed 2009 Copenhagen Summit: Climate action could not be left to a behind-the-scenes obscure intergovernmental forum of states. Under the leadership of Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres, a large external network including domestic state actors and non-state actors had been built and this external network did its job. Following the election of Trump, supporters of climate action came out strong in the United States, other key states in Europe and China also issued their support, and eventually not another state followed

Trump in withdrawing. When President Biden was elected, he could rejoin the Paris Agreement on his first day in office.

The case study on the IEA, while also heavily affected by the international policy agenda on climate change, was different. For a long time, the IEA focused on its core mandate of energy security and fossil fuels having only OECD member states around the table. Internal critiques went nowhere with the result that Denmark, Germany, and Spain eventually felt the need to set up a competitor institution IRENA on renewable energy with a potentially universal membership. The initial response of the IEA was slow and the IEA even tried to resist the creation of IRENA. Only with the appointment of a new Executive Director, Birol, in 2015 did the IEA adopt a proactive response of discursive and behavioural adaption. The adoption of the Paris Agreement was undoubtedly a catalyst, but under Birol, the IEA implemented its modernization strategy where it added energy transition and renewables to its mandate. It recruited expertise for this purpose and it also developed cooperation with a range of other IOs including IRENA and the UNFCCC, but also the G7/G20 forums. Furthermore, Birol was instrumental in the 'opening the door' policy and associate membership beyond the OECD. In the end, the IEA managed to reestablish itself as the focal institution in the field of energy.

When taking the findings of both case studies together, it is striking that the responses of the IO institutional actors differed. This is particularly clear in how institutional actors tailored their response to the types of existential challenges (Proposition 1, see Chapter 2). The actors in the UNFCCC Secretariat adopted a strategy of resistance. Giving in to the Trump administration would likely erode core climate action norms and targets, with other states likely joining the race to the bottom. The theoretical option of adaptation was therefore not attractive with the result that the UNFCCC largely focused on resistance, even if remaining diplomatic in public. In the case study of the IEA we see the opposite. Despite initial resistance of the IEA to the creation of a parallel agency for renewable energy, the IEA ultimately chose to adapt its organization through a layering strategy in which it added renewable energy to its mandate and opened up for different sorts of countries beyond the OECD as well as engaging with other relevant IOs.

What we can also take from both case studies, when comparing them, is the importance of the institutional features of both IOs (Proposition 2, see Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, we have detailed a very strong difference between the powerful World Bank and the weak WTO. The cases in this chapter fall in between. Nonetheless, we see that institutional features are important with respect to the responses of institutional actors. Leadership featured in both

the UNFCCC and IEA. For the UNFCCC, the leadership component was largely in making the UNFCCC Secretariat a more purposeful actor after Kyoto and Copenhagen, which included building a very large external network of like-minded state and non-state actors. This external network proved essential the moment Donald Trump was elected President. In the case of the IEA, leadership was equally a key element. Striking in this regard was the proactiveness of the IEA in pursuing reforms once the new Executive Director Birol was appointed. This marked a difference from his predecessor. Equally, Birol opened up the IEA to the benefit of the organization. While in both case studies, we have also seen how these institutional actors are constrained, for instance by their formal competences, we have identified proactive responsiveness in both.

This chapter has therefore added further evidence for the argument of this book. In Chapter 5, this book provides two case studies of IO institutional actors responding to existential challenges in the field of security and defence.

5
Security and Defence

Over the last decade, many IOs have been existentially challenged by their own member states. Member states have used both direct forms of contestation but have also indirectly challenged IOs through the creation of competing institutions. Such challenges can rise to the threshold of being existential challenges when they put IOs at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out some of their core functions or sustain their dominance and relevance within their policy arenas. In the previous two empirical Chapters 3 and 4, we have studied four case studies. The WTO and UNFCCC were directly challenged by the Trump administration, while the World Bank and IEA faced indirect challenges through the creation of competing institutions. In the former two cases, we found respectively no strategic response and a response of resistance. In the latter two cases, on the other hand, both incumbent IOs adapted and strategically reached out to the newly created IOs; in the case of the World Bank more immediately than in the case of the IEA where institutional actors took some time to respond. Such variation in responses by institutional actors across these cases can be clearly explained by their institutional features. While they tailored their response to the exact type of challenge, the purposefulness of their responses was determined notably by their leadership, but also their organizational structure and external networks.

This is the final empirical chapter that analyses why the institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges. The focus is on two IOs in the policy area of security and defence. It studies responses to existential challenges experienced, respectively, by NATO and the OSCE. While security IOs and alliances are normally considered member states-driven, which is also the case in NATO and the OSCE as both observe clear consensus rules in decision-making, several international actors have developed serious bureaucracies over time and even, in some cases, centralized command and control structures (e.g. Dijkstra, 2016; Mattelaer, 2013; cf. Haftendorn, Keohane, & Wallander, 1999). Indeed, NATO and the OSCE have (civilian) secretariats with well over 250 civil servants, which puts both in the top 90th

percentile of IOs in terms of staff (see Table 1.1). This makes them also important test-cases for the argument of this book: Because they are considered member-driven by design, conventional wisdom holds that they are least-likely cases for proactive and strategic responses by institutional actors. If we do, however, find such behaviour, it is strong evidence for the argument of our book that the institutional features of IOs matter.

The first case study in the chapter is about the Trump administration directly contesting NATO. While transatlantic burden-sharing has long been a challenge for NATO, with the United States contributing disproportionately to European security, Donald Trump took this to a whole new level. During his election campaign, he already threatened to break up alliances if allies do not pay up. And during his first NATO summit as the U.S. President, he refused to endorse cornerstone Article 5 on collective defence, thereby putting the credibility of the Alliance at risk. The *New York Times* reported that Trump privately wanted to withdraw from the Alliance and he came close to putting in motion such a withdrawal process in July 2018 (Barnes & Cooper 2019; see also Schuette, 2021a). In addition to this challenge of burden-sharing, President Trump proposed a rapprochement with Putin's Russia. This also constituted an existential challenge to NATO, whose core rationale was to 'keep the Russians out' in the words of former Secretary-General Lord Ismay. Indeed, after the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO had stepped up its deterrence measures with tougher policies towards Russia. The combined challenge of burden-sharing and changing the stance on Russia therefore potentially risked seriously undermining NATO as an institution.

How NATO institutional actors responded was surprising. Whereas other European leaders had great difficulty building a sustained rapport with Donald Trump, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg developed good relations. Strategically, Stoltenberg placated Trump, noting that Trump was right on NATO burden-sharing and actually used Trump as leverage to get other allies to increase their commitments. His strategy of discursive—though not so much behavioural—adaptation was coupled with a strategy of behavioural resistance on Russia policy. Instead of dealing directly with Trump, NATO actors went through various more like-minded U.S. institutions, such as the Departments of Defense and State, the National Security Council (NSC), and also U.S. Congress, to ensure continued U.S. support for stepping up deterrence. NATO leadership by the Secretary-General was therefore of key importance (Schuette, 2021a), but equally was the wider external network with NATO being embedded in the Euro-Atlantic security establishment. By the end of his presidency, Trump embraced NATO

as serving a 'great purpose' noting that it was 'very insulting' of the French President Macron to refer to NATO as 'braindead' (as cited in NATO, 2019b).

The second case study in this chapter concerns the OSCE. While the OSCE became active with several dozen field missions in the area of comprehensive security during the early 1990s (from the Balkans to Eastern Europe and Central Asia), it soon faced indirect challenges from other IOs also moving into this security space. In particular, the EU developed its own security policy in the early 2000s with parallel civilian missions. By the 2020s, the EU had established two dozen missions, whereas the OSCE was forced to terminate most of its field activities due to a lack of continued support by its participating states. This OSCE case study not just reveals the indirect challenge by other institutions but also the broader legitimacy crisis that the organization has been facing since 2000 (see Schuette & Dijkstra, 2023a). While the EU and also NATO were simultaneously setting up competing activities and expanding their memberships, the mandate of the OSCE was undermined by Russia under President Putin (2000–present), who increasingly contested the human dimension of the OSCE, notably its activities in the area of election monitoring and human rights. Hamstrung by Russia and emerging East–West tensions in general, the OSCE failed to adequately respond and proactively develop a niche for itself with respect to field activities.

These challenges to the OSCE, with Western states preferring other institutions and Eastern states contesting parts of its mandate, were tough for its institutional actors. Set up originally during the Cold War as a forum rather than an organization for security, the OSCE lacks legal personality, and its institutional actors are notoriously weak. Secretaries-General have been career diplomats with little authority over their own decentralized and fragmented organization, without many formal competences, and no serious external network to support them. Thus unsurprisingly, OSCE institutional actors have not had the ability to proactively respond. It took them a very long time to recognize the various challenges to the organization and when they did in the early 2010s it was too late. The then-Secretaries-General tried to set up a modest network of think tanks and academics, to embed the OSCE in an epistemic community, and put forward some proposals for reform, but this had little result. In the aftermath of the Russian illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, most of the participating states 'east of Vienna' stopped hosting the OSCE field operations. Soon after the Russian full-fledged war on Ukraine in 2022, the OSCE had to terminate its large-scale monitoring mission in Ukraine. Since the start of the war the OSCE has been heavily geopoliticized, gridlocked, and has had to fight for actual survival.

These two final case studies of NATO and the OSCE complete our analysis of the factors that explain variation in the responses of IO institutional actors to existential challenges. Both NATO and the OSCE have sizeable bureaucracies on paper, which they can theoretically use to cope with or even counter existential challenges. Yet this chapter, perhaps even more so than Chapters 3 and 4, highlights how the ability of IOs to respond varies depending on the specific institutional features. Notably, leadership is critical, but also a clear organizational structure and the embeddedness in external networks are important. Both case studies also provide some evidence of the significance of formal competences and the discretion of institutional actors to be entrepreneurial. The NATO case highlights, in particular, the considerable leadership of Secretary-General Stoltenberg in response to Trump. He was at least as proactive in terms of response as the World Bank President dealing with the AIIB (Chapter 3). Other elements also fell in place including his authority over the organization, the management of meetings, and the bipartisan support for NATO across American politics. In the case of the OSCE, we find very weak institutional actors that were not able to proactively respond to changes in the post-Cold War landscape. Taken together, the cases furthermore illustrate how the chosen responses are tailored to the type of challenges, most notably in the case of NATO where the response to Trump differed on burden-sharing and Russia policy.

As with the previous two chapters, the focus here is only on identifying the response strategies pursued by IOs to existential challenges and highlighting the role of leading institutional actors and their bureaucracies in that process. It is more difficult to make causal claims about the actions of institutional actors and the survival and decline of NATO and the OSCE. In line with the previous chapters, the sections begin first by introducing the respective IOs and their main functions before turning to the specific existential challenges under study. The sections then examine the institutional responses pushed by the respective IOs before turning to the outcome of the episode and offering a recap of the findings.

5.1 NATO and the Trump presidency

5.1.1 NATO and its main functions

NATO is the anchor of transatlantic relations between the United States, Canada, and Europe. Created by twelve states in the aftermath of the Second World War as a defensive alliance against the Soviet Union and its proxies,

NATO today includes more than thirty member states and pursues a much more expansive interpretation of providing security. At the heart of the North Atlantic Treaty, NATO's founding document, lies the mutual defence clause. Article 5 states that allies would consider 'an armed attack against one or more of them … an attack against them all' (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). Apart from deterring attacks against its members, NATO also engages in crisis management operations around the world. From securing Kosovo to supporting Iraqi security institutions to fatefully training Afghan security forces, NATO has sought to provide security well beyond the transatlantic space. In addition, as part of its collective security policy, NATO has developed partnerships with a whole range of countries, in Europe and across the world, and has developed relations with other key IOs (EU, UN, and AU) and supported their work.

NATO has also ensured peaceful relations among the member states. NATO's headquarters in Brussels serves as a crucial forum for diplomatic consultations and policy coordination among the allies, including the Defence Planning Process to harmonize capabilities and ensure interoperability among national armies. Allied leaders regularly convene at the highest political level in the North Atlantic Council to discuss common security challenges. No less meaningful, at the military level, NATO organizes regular exercises among its allies, with the exercise Steadfast Defender in 2024 involving more than 90,000 troops (U.S. Department of Defense, 2024). Over the past seventy-five years, NATO has thus played a major role in creating a transatlantic security community (Deutsch et al., 1957), among whom war has become unthinkable.

NATO is designed as a largely intergovernmental organization, which is not surprising given the sensitivity of security and defence policy. The member states in the North Atlantic Council are firmly in control of the decision-making processes, and institutional actors retain little formal authority (see Zürn et al., 2021, p. 436; Hooghe et al. 2017, p. 150ff.). Accordingly, NATO's Secretary-General is considered more a secretary than a general. And yet, NATO's institutions possess some potential sources of influence (Mayer, 2014). The Secretary-General organizes NATO Summits and functions as the permanent chair of the North Atlantic Council. He can thus set the agenda of important meetings and drive compromises (Hendrickson, 2006). The last two Secretaries-General—Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Jens Stoltenberg—had also previously been heads of government, which goes hand in hand with elevated standing among their peers, political acumen, media prominence, and extensive contacts into many capitals. In addition, the international staff is large with 1000 officials and includes a dedicated policy planning

unit in the Secretary-General's private office to offer strategic advice as well as a well-equipped public diplomacy division and a forward-looking division on emerging security challenges. The international staff represents a clear hierarchical organizational structure serving the alliance's leadership even if nationality plays a considerable role in the appointment of upper management (Dijkstra, 2016, Chapter 4).

Notwithstanding NATO's longevity and apparent successes, the history of NATO is also a history of crises (Thies, 2009; Webber, Sperling & Smith, 2012). Hardly a year goes by without an alleged crisis for the alliance, and many nails in the coffin have been final ones. The French withdrawal from the military command structure in 1966, popular opposition in several key allies to the double-track decision in 1979, the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the primary *raison d'être*, and the many shortcomings of NATO missions in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan have all placed NATO's future in jeopardy. But few, if any, of these threats have been as existential for NATO as the presidency of Donald Trump, which is the subject of Section 5.1.2.

5.1.2 The challenge of burden-sharing and Russia policy

The United States is an indispensable member of NATO. A military behemoth, its defence budget is roughly thrice that of all other allies (even if the United States spends significant proportions on non-European theatres). As the military operation to overthrow Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 or the chaotic evacuation of Kabul in 2021 as part of the wider NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan testified, NATO cannot conduct operations without significant leadership by the United States. NATO's support for Ukraine following the Russian attack in 2022 would have been much less effective had it not been for U.S. leadership. Indeed, the United States has led the important Ukraine Defense Contact Group, originally from its Ramstein Airbase. U.S. nationals hold key positions within the NATO institutions, particularly in the military command structures (an American is always the Supreme Allied Commander Europe [SACEUR], the *de facto* military leader of the alliance). And the American nuclear umbrella is the cornerstone of NATO's nuclear defence and deterrence policy. Thus, wavering by the United States over its Article 5 commitment, let alone potential U.S. withdrawal, would be tantamount to an existential challenge for the Alliance with a risk of termination.

In the 1980s, long before Trump even countenanced a role in U.S. politics, he had made several interventions criticizing the principle of burden-sharing

between the United States and its allies. In 1987, he paid for an obscure advertisement in the *New York Times*, in which he complained that the United States was 'defending wealthy nations for nothing, nations that would be wiped off the face of the earth in about fifteen minutes if it weren't for us' (see Laderman & Simms, 2017, p. 3ff.). During the presidential campaign in 2016, Donald Trump habitually toyed with the prospect of withdrawing the United States from NATO. Lamenting the insufficient European defence spending, he demanded that allies must 'pay up, including for past deficiencies, or they have to get out. And if that breaks up NATO, it breaks up NATO' (as cited in Barigazzi, 2016). Trump also questioned the underlying logic of unconditional support for allies when positing that he would only defend Baltic allies against Russian aggression if they had 'fulfilled their obligations to us' (as cited in Fischer, 2016). Had Trump carried out his threat to revoke U.S. guarantees in the event that allied defence spending did not meet his demands, this would in effect have terminated the alliance built on the principle of unconditional solidarity in the face of external threats. Right before assuming office, Trump doubled down and sent shockwaves to Brussels and allied capitals when labelling the alliance 'obsolete' (as cited in Johnson, 2017).

Beyond transatlantic burden-sharing, Trump also wanted to re-establish cordial relations with Russia. He repeatedly expressed his admiration for President Putin, calling him a 'strong leader, a powerful leader' (as cited in Russia Matters, 2018). He also lobbied to reintegrate Russia into the G7, denied Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election, implicitly acknowledged Russia's annexation of Crimea, and cast doubts about whether his administration would uphold the sanction regime. Moreover, his foreign policy team and trusted circle were replete with Russophiles with close connections to Moscow (including Paul Mannafort, Carter Page, and Newt Gingrich). Trump's benevolence towards Russia thus risked reversing NATO's reinforced defence and deterrence posture towards Russia, which developed since the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, and would have undermined the very *raison d'être* of the Alliance (see Tardy, 2021).

Trump came within an inch of carrying out his threats. Trump's 'America First' rhetoric had been particularly pronounced during the summer of 2018—in June he had refused to sign the G7 statement. At the NATO summit, Trump hijacked a working meeting originally aimed at fostering relations with Ukraine and Georgia to threaten fellow allied leaders that the United States would 'go its own way' should his burden-sharing demands not be met (Emmot, Mason, & De Carbonnel, 2018). Stunned officials from the U.S. delegation were instructed to consult on the legal procedures of leaving NATO, and Defense Secretary Mattis signalled his intention to resign

that day should Trump follow through (Schuette, 2021a). While in the end Trump could be persuaded not to announce the U.S. withdrawal, this episode was only the starkest reminder to NATO officials that the alliance's survival was at stake (Interviews #C2, #C5, #C8, #C9). NATO eventually survived the Trump presidency, but as Donald Trump returned to the political stage during the Republican primaries in 2024, the question of the future of NATO and the U.S. commitment almost immediately returned (e.g. Daalder, 2024). In other words, the threat of Donald Trump to the North Atlantic Alliance was (and is) both existential and very real.

5.1.3 NATO's response to the Trump presidency

NATO officials faced a dilemma in dealing with Trump. On the one hand, given the indispensability of the United States for NATO, Trump's threats generated massive pressure to adapt to his demands and thus avert potentially fatal sanctioning or withdrawal. On the other hand, his demands, in particular on Russia, created strong pressure to resist because Trump threatened core features of the Alliance (see accommodation dilemma, Chapter 2). In response, NATO officials around Secretary-General Stoltenberg developed a cunning survival strategy (see Table 5.1 for an overview of the findings). They set out to strategically navigate the dilemma by overtly signalling sufficient adaptation on burden-sharing (mostly *discursive adaptation*), which was not considered harmful to the Alliance but indeed actually beneficial, to placate the U.S. President. At the same time, they subtly tried to insulate NATO's Russia policy from Trump's demands (*behavioural resistance*). To publicly side with Trump, NATO institutional actors pressured allies into spending more on defence, and subsequently selling even modest increases as dramatic successes to please Trump. In other words, Secretary-General Stoltenberg and senior NATO officials engaged in extraordinary proactive yet carefully balanced behaviour.

The *leadership* by Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and other senior officials proved critical in formulating and executing NATO's survival strategy. He was well connected, with greater authority than the usual IO leaders given his background as former Norwegian prime minister, and also widely perceived as a trusted broker without a personal agenda (Interviews #C2, #C7, #C10, #C11, #C15). Stoltenberg's deputy, Rose Gottemoeller (2016–2019), was a former U.S. Under Secretary in the State Department with extensive connections in Washington. Stoltenberg also quickly realized that he had to build a personal rapport with Trump and used his extensive diplomatic

experiences to do so. He also understood how to use the media to play to Trump's narcissism. Stoltenberg's rank, experience, political instincts, and unassuming character were thus key. It set him aside from all other IO leaders discussed in this book, with perhaps the exception of World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, who provided equally proactive leadership (see Chapter 3).

Secretary-General Stoltenberg could benefit from the NATO International Staff, which employs around 1000 officials and has a dedicated Public Diplomacy Division, Policy Planning Unit, and Emerging Security Challenges Division (Dijkstra, 2015, 2016). This is therefore a sizeable bureaucracy with a clear hierarchical *organizational structure* that answers to the political leadership. For a member-driven IO, it is indeed striking that NATO has more civilians on the payroll than, say, the WTO or UNFCCC dealing with respectively world trade and climate change (see Chapters 3 and 4). The NATO International Staff is also less of a type of treaty secretariat, mostly facilitating meetings and conferences, and a more policy bureaucracy with a great deal of in-house expertise. While Bayerlein et al. (2020) in their book on bureaucratic styles of IOs classify the NATO International Staff as 'servant-style' (p. 158), it is a highly effective servant to the Secretary-General and the NATO mission more broadly.

Just as the international staff as an expert bureaucracy is too often dismissed in the literature and policy circles, so are the *formal competences* of NATO international actors. In terms of the existing datasets on international authority, NATO ranks low (see Zürn et al. 2021, p. 436; Hooghe et al. 2017, p. 150ff.). But this also has to do with the conceptualizations of authority that put a premium on IOs with adjudication bodies (like the WTO). Noteworthy about NATO is that the Secretary-General has considerable agenda-setting powers as he chairs the North Atlantic Council and organizes NATO summits (NATO, 2011, p. 70). Other NATO committees have equally permanent chairs. That all civilian NATO meetings are consistently led under the direct authority of the Secretary-General is exceptional compared to other IOs that normally have elected or rotating chairpersons (Tallberg, 2010). As the public face of the alliance and the main person in charge of external representation, supported by a considerable Public Policy Division, the Secretary-General also tends to receive significant media attention and can therefore shape public debates.

In terms of its embeddedness in *external networks*, NATO is not known for its openness to non-state actors, yet it is *the* central organization for the collective defence of most allies and at the heart of the Euro-Atlantic security establishment. As a result, NATO institutional actors are well connected and

have strong external networks. The view among non-White House actors in the United States and other allies toward NATO was also favourable. Powerful member states such as Germany or the United Kingdom viewed Trump's attacks on NATO in dismay and supported Stoltenberg's survival strategy, even when he publicly criticized some European allies for underspending on defence (Interviews #C5, #C13). Furthermore, NATO could rely on strong support from within the U.S. Congress, State Department, Congress, NSC as well as non-governmental actors such as influential think tanks (Interviews #A3, #C7, #C14, #C16). The U.S. public also remained in favour of continued U.S. membership of the alliance (Pew, 2020). Compared to, say, the WTO which was criticized widely in the United States, NATO actually had considerable support.

Even if NATO still remains known as member-driven, against these institutional features, it is not a surprise that NATO institutional actors developed a proactive and strategic response to President Trump. The rigour with which this strategic response was implemented and the way in which NATO actors carefully balanced different demands are nevertheless noteworthy. It is, in this regard, instructive to first analyse the response to the challenge of burden-sharing before going into the challenge of Trump's demands on Russia policy.

With regard to burden-sharing, it was publicly known from the very beginning that Trump would demand more from allies. Stoltenberg used his position as public spokesperson for the alliance to publicly pressure allies to increase defence spending and credit the U.S. President for allegedly achieving greater burden-sharing (Interview #C1). In other words, the Secretary-General thus adopted a strategy of *discursive adaptation* to placate Trump to leverage the other allies into behavioural adaptation.[1] On the day before the inauguration of Donald Trump, for instance, Stoltenberg stated that he and Trump agree

> that European allies have to invest more in collective defense … I have raised it in all capitals, and I will work together with him (Trump) on how we can convey that strong message. … I am looking forward to work with President Trump on how to adapt NATO. … [To sit] around the table and have an open discussion. That's the best way to create strength and unity: to be together and discuss common challenges. (as cited in Heath, 2017)

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[1] NATO institutional actors themselves did not adapt behaviourally. Burden-sharing and increased defence spending by European allies had long been a NATO priority, including as part of the commitments at the 2014 Wales Summit. For NATO actors, the purpose was to leverage the threat of Trump to get the Europeans to move more quickly.

Table 5.1 Overview of empirical findings on NATO and the OSCE

	NATO	OSCE
Existential challenge	President Trump fails to endorse Article 5, considers withdrawal, and pursues a Russia-friendly policy	Development of EU security policy undermining the role of OSCE in civilian crisis management
Institutional actors		
Leadership	Secretary-General is a former prime minister	Secretary-General is a career diplomat with a restricted mandate serving under the Chairperson-in-Office
Organizational structure	Considerable expert bureaucracy with policy divisions including for public diplomacy and emerging security challenges	Decentralized organization with limited authority of Vienna secretariat over the three key institutions and field operations. Heavy budgetary control and term limits for personnel
Formal competences	Agenda-shaping competences and a role in external representation	Limited formal competences. Chairperson-in-office leads
External networks	At the heart of the Euro-Atlantic security establishment with a strong network across various US institutions	Limited support, networks, and awareness of the organization
Institutional response	Secretary-General placates and leverages Trump on burden-sharing (mostly *discursive adaptation*) while quietly shielding NATO from Trump's Russia policy (*behavioural resistance*)	OSCE is forced to divest in civilian crisis management and engage in lower spectrum activities. Hardly any proactive response *(some behavioural adaptation)*
Outcome	NATO comes out unshattered with Trump eventually endorsing the alliance	OSCE declines as a security organization in Europe

Throughout the Trump presidency, Stoltenberg went out of his way to flatter the U.S. President. On his first visit to Washington in April 2017, he publicly agreed with Trump on defence spending and expressed gratitude for his 'strong commitment to Europe' (as cited in Nelson, 2017). During his visit to the White House in May 2018, Stoltenberg thanked Trump for 'his leadership … on the issue of defence spending [which] has really helped to make a difference' (as cited in Okun, 2018). In 2019, the Secretary-General intensified his tailored communicative efforts aimed at Trump and repeatedly referred

to what emerged as NATO's new mantra on burden-sharing: the 'extra 100 billion' of allied defence spending thanks to Trump's pressure. Stoltenberg reiterated to Trump that 'your leadership on defence spending is having a real impact' (as cited in NATO, 2019b). To drive home his message, Stoltenberg even appeared on Trump's favourite and unapologetically partisan broadcaster, Fox News. This was unprecedented for a NATO Secretary-General. Thus, Stoltenberg therefore played to Trump's narcissism by strategically flattering him.

The Secretary-General strategically promoted the view that Trump had prevailed over opposition from other member states. Importantly, the Secretary-General always chose to compare the spending figures to 2016—the year of Trump's election—rather than 2015, when the allies' budgets first showed increases, to obscure the possibility that factors other than Trump could be responsible (NATO, 2019a). The Secretary-General not only understood the power of the media in public discourse in general and for the U.S. President—reportedly an avid consumer of U.S. television—in particular, but also consciously adopted a simplistic and servile communication style to flatter the egocentric Trump (Interviews #C2, #C10, #C11, #C13, #C15). One interviewee (#C7) adds that Stoltenberg would always present the defence spending figures in very simple bar charts to capture the President's attention and cater for his alleged short attention span and inattention to detail.

NATO officials also used their *formal procedural powers* to shape what proved to be the most perilous moment for NATO during the Trump presidency—the NATO summit in July 2018. Witnessing Trump's escalation, Stoltenberg sensed the impending danger and used his procedural power as chair of the North Atlantic Council and decided to turn the working meeting into an impromptu crisis meeting on burden-sharing. This was a highly unusual, strategic decision by the Secretary-General as NATO summits tend to be ritualistic and formulaic. Calling this meeting proved critical in appeasing Trump; it played to the narcissistic propensities of the U.S. President by allowing him to take centre stage, vent his frustration over burden-sharing, and pressure Europeans to make concessions, letting him walk away with a sense of victory (Interviews #C3, #C7, #C10). The summit of 2018 marked the beginning of Trump's conversion. Without Stoltenberg's unscripted and spontaneous decision to call the emergency session, all indicators suggest that Trump would at least have caused severe damage to the alliance.

The adaptation by NATO institutional actors on burden-sharing was thus largely discursive. It was about giving Trump the impression and personal satisfaction that increases in defence spending by European allies were entirely his doing. Any modest increase was sold back as a large gain, never

mind that NATO allies already had made previous commitments to go toward 2% defence spending by 2024. By 2019, Trump nonetheless stated that 'people are paying and I'm very happy with the fact that they're paying' (as cited in Browne, 2019). Actual behavioural adaptation by European allies was, however, limited. With the benefit of hindsight, and the Russian war against Ukraine starting in 2022, it is clear that European allies (a) did far too little in terms of defence spending in the period 2014–2021 and (b) could have done much more as the call for *Zeitenwende* after February 2022 made clear. In other words, this existential challenge to NATO was largely fended off through the discursive strategies of NATO institutional actors, notably Stoltenberg.

Contrary to burden-sharing, NATO institutional actors could not support Trump's demands for rapprochement with Russia, which would have subverted the very purpose of the alliance. To elude frustrating Trump, the NATO leadership set out to subtly resist his demands by shielding Russia policy from him and building coalitions with supportive third parties. This was a strategy of *behavioural resistance*. In contrast to the approach to burden-sharing, this was not matched with discursive strategies. Indeed, the Secretary-General carefully avoided talking about Russia at all in Trump's presence. In the press conferences or remarks following their six bilateral meetings between April 2017 and December 2019, Stoltenberg always emphasized the need for greater defence spending, but he did not mention Russia policy in three of the press conferences, while in the others he only addressed Russia cursorily (see NATO, 2019b; Stoltenberg, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2019b).

To resist Trump's demands on Russia, NATO officials used previously unimaginable strategies of circumventing the White House to shield NATO's Russia policy from Trump, relying on *external networks* with other actors. Using his personal network as much as his deputy's, the Secretary-General worked through the traditional transatlantic establishment in the Pentagon, State Department, and Congress to coordinate policies and maintain U.S. domestic support for the alliance (Interview #C14). Within the Trump administration, there were several pro-NATO supporters. General McMaster was appointed National Security Advisor in the summer of 2017 and swiftly brought in experienced foreign policy experts such as Fiona Hill, while General Kelly became White House chief of staff. U.S. Defense Secretary Mattis became NATO officials' main point of contact and together they kept important policy initiatives, such as NATO's Readiness Initiative, beneath Trump's radar (Interviews #C3, #C5, #C11, #C12). NATO actors also cultivated relations with like-minded actors to generate domestic pressure on Trump and

circumvent his direct involvement in Russia policy. One interviewee confirms that there were consistent backchannels between Stoltenberg's office and supportive U.S. officials in the Pentagon and NSC to coordinate policy and shield NATO (Russia policy) from Trump as much as possible (Interview #C14).

Defense Secretary Mattis was a particularly strong supporter of NATO's Russia policy. He devised NATO's Readiness Initiative, eventually agreed upon in 2018 with limited involvement from the White House, which committed the Alliance to have thirty battalions, thirty air squadrons, and thirty naval combat vessels ready to use within thirty days. NATO, with active support from the United States, also implemented the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative in 2017, agreed at the Warsaw summit in 2016, deploying four multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland to bolster its deterrent posture. Mattis also reinforced Stoltenberg's reputation in private meetings with Trump (Snodgrass, 2019, pp. 166–167). Throughout Trump's term in office, the Secretary-General also cultivated relations with U.S. parliamentarians, regularly hosting them in Brussels, and speaking in front of both Houses of Congress as the very first leader of any IO to ever do so.

Combining NATO officials' use of informal agenda-setting powers and external networks, NATO actors tried to Trump-proof summits where Russia was a key discussion point. In the run-up to the 2018 summit, NATO officials together with U.S. diplomats successfully pressured ambassadors to agree upon a declaration prior to the summit to avoid last-minute interferences from Trump (Interviews #C2, #C6, #C7). They decided to keep the text 'short and sweet' and publicly downplay the achievements to keep them beneath Trump's radar (Interview #C17). Stoltenberg also postponed Trump's first visit to NATO headquarters in the hope that Trump would have been taught the value of the alliance by the 'adults in the room' (Interviews #C1, #C4). And he downgraded NATO's 70th anniversary summit in April 2019 to a foreign ministerial meeting, which was attended by Secretary of State Pompeo instead (Interviews #C3, #C4).

When taking a broader look at the responses of NATO institutional actors to the existential challenge of the Trump presidency, we see several balanced and measured responses. It is very clear that NATO actors, led by Secretary-General Stoltenberg, were keenly aware of the existential challenge that Donald Trump posed. While there were considerable pro-NATO voices in his administration and throughout Washington, President Trump himself could still do considerable damage to the Alliance. What is striking from the NATO responses is that the institutional actors consider how different

challenges by Trump would have different impacts. They thus approached the challenge of burden-sharing differently from the contestation of NATO's Russia policy. Essentially, NATO actors could not go along with Trump's demands though they could not be seen either as resisting the President. Here, the distinction between the discursive and behavioural responses of NATO actors is important. The way in which Secretary-General Stoltenberg framed modest increases in defence spending through discursive terms is striking. At the same time, the depoliticization of Russia policy by keeping it out of the hands of Trump and by being quiet about it is also noteworthy. Across the six case studies of this book, the response of NATO institutional actors was the most proactive and carefully crafted.

5.1.4 Outcome of the challenge to NATO

By the end of his tenure, Trump embraced NATO in a statement as serving a 'great purpose' (as cited in NATO, 2019b). While the President withdrew the United States from the Iran Nuclear Deal, the Paris Agreement and UNESCO, and undermined the WTO, WHO and UN Refugee Agency from within, NATO thus survived this existential challenge. Stoltenberg and senior NATO officials were a necessary factor in managing the critical summit of 2018, where President Trump was on the verge of announcing a U.S. withdrawal from NATO over burden-sharing disputes, and that his contribution was also critical in persuading Trump that allies were heeding his calls to increase their defence spending, even though those increases fell short of Trump's demands. NATO actors also played an important role in maintaining a robust Russia policy by shielding it from Trump. Given the poor personal relations between most of the allied leaders (such as Macron and Merkel) and Trump, as well as between Trump and the adults in the room, none of them had any noteworthy influence on the U.S. President. Indeed, by the time of Trump's public conversion, figures from the transatlantic establishment had long lost positions in the Trump administration. One official directly involved with the U.S. President confirmed that they 'had no intellectual impact on Trump' and 'never made a dent' in his views on NATO (Interview #C18).

Thus, NATO actors exhibited a striking degree of agency in helping NATO survive. NATO profited from strong proactive *leadership* by Stoltenberg himself and his close confidantes. This was coupled with a clear *organizational structure* that enabled a consistent Trump strategy, senior officials' formal and informal agenda-setting *competences*, and extensive *external networks*,

particularly in Washington. This provided them with the ability to craft and implement a successful survival strategy tailored to the specific challenges posed by Trump on specific issues. Indeed, had NATO actors acted as passive servants, as most writing on the subject presumes, Trump could have been much more destructive. Congress would have likely prevented Trump from formally withdrawing the United States from NATO—in 2019, both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed legislation to prevent him from using federal funds to bring about such a withdrawal. But without the actions of Stoltenberg, it is plausible that if Trump had still expressed his intention to withdraw, the mere announcement of that intention would have meant the *de facto* end of NATO in its current form with Article 5 no longer holding any deterrence credibility. A passive Secretary-General would have also been unable to build a close rapport with Trump and convince him in 2019 that he had successfully imposed his will on allies to achieve greater burden-sharing.

In addition, passive NATO actors would have been unable to manage the highly contingent 2018 summit. National officials would have still tried to shield the proceedings from Trump; but without senior officials heaping pressures on allies to agree to a summit declaration early and, crucially, without the Secretary-General strategically using his procedural powers to provide Trump with the opportunity to voice his grievances, the U.S. President would probably have refused to sign the summit declaration (as he did at the G7), and in doing so blocked important NATO initiatives and massively undermined the credibility of the alliance. It is entirely conceivable that he would have continued publicly berating allies, toying with the idea of withdrawal, and potentially politicizing NATO membership during the 2020 presidential election campaign.

NATO thus came out of the Trump presidency relatively unshattered. Upon entering office, President Biden and his Secretary of State Blinken went to great lengths in affirming the value of NATO and the transatlantic partnership with the United States. Not least, the coordinated and determined allied response to Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 demonstrates the potency of NATO. It is almost inconceivable that the West would have responded as assertively—delivering extensive weaponry to Ukraine, providing financial support, coordinating their sanctions, or shoring up the defence and deterrence posture in Eastern Europe—without NATO serving as the crucial forum for coordinating transatlantic security policy. Nonetheless, the prospect of Trump re-entering the White House in 2025 meant the spectre of existential threats continued to hover over the Alliance. Indeed, in January 2024, just as Trump was winning the first Republican primaries,

Secretary-General Stoltenberg visited the *Heritage Foundation* (a Trump stronghold in Washington, D.C.) with a message on defence spending and China (NATO, 2024), which can only be seen as an attempt to reach out to a potential second Trump administration. Discursive adaptation alone as a response strategy is unlikely sufficient for the second-term Trump presidency.

5.2 OSCE and the development of EU security policy

5.2.1 The OSCE and its main functions

The OSCE grew out of the Helsinki Accords of 1975, which legalized the period of detente during the Cold War (see for background and some of the crises that the OSCE has faced Cupać, 2024; Flynn & Farrell, 1999; Galbreath, 2007; Peters, 2013; Schuette & Dijkstra, 2023a; Stewart, 2008). Originally conceived as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), the Accords included a 'Decalogue' of ten core principles and three 'baskets' for their implementation dealing with (1) security and confidence building measures, (2) cooperation in the field of economics, science and technology, and the environment, as well as (3) a human dimension stimulating peoples-to-peoples contacts including travel and cultural and educational exchanges (CSCE, 1975). The CSCE thus had a broad scope. The Accords were meant to acknowledge, even recognize, the status quo of Soviet dominance over Central and Eastern European countries by the West, while at the same time insisting on the rights of these countries (after the violent interventions in Budapest and Prague) and to re-establish regular contacts between East and West (see Galbreath, 2007 for an excellent introduction on the CSCE/OSCE).

At the end of the Cold War in 1990, the then thirty-four CSCE participating states adopted the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe*, which included new liberal clauses and carried the heading 'A new era of Democracy, Peace and Unity' in line with the spirit of the time.[2] The Paris Charter also set in motion a process that led participating states to transform the CSCE into the

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[2] The CSCE and OSCE formally do not have member states but 'participating states' reflecting that these organizations are based on political declarations rather than treaties. The book therefore uses participating states in line with the official terminology, even if the OSCE is conceptually a regular IO with member states (i.e. it has more than two states as members, it meets regularly through the Permanent Council with the states having permanent missions in Vienna, and it has a permanent secretariat and correspondence address, as per the IO definition of Pevehouse et al. (2020)). On the OSCE legal framework, see Platise, Moser, & Peters (2019).

OSCE in 1995, thereby becoming a full-fledged organization with permanent structures such as the Secretariat in Vienna. Before the Paris Charter, there were 'no offices, buildings, CSCE staff, or even planned regular meetings' (Galbreath, 2019, p. 74). The participating states furthermore set up three institutions for specialized tasks: The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) based in Warsaw, with the mandate to observe elections in the OSCE's member states, advise governments on how to reform domestic institutions, and train officials in the then-new democracies; the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media (RFoM) in Vienna to monitor the freedom of expression and of the media; and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) in The Hague with the task of analysing and making recommendations on how to address causes of ethnic tensions in the member states.

The OSCE currently has fifty-seven participating states, including Canada and the United States, all European countries, including Russia and Turkey, as well as the countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia (a membership from 'Vancouver to Vladivostok'). The OSCE is led by the Chairperson-in-Office, normally a foreign minister elected for a period of one year. Decision-making takes place on the basis of consensus in the Permanent Council, with permanent representatives of the participating states residing in Vienna, as well as the annual Ministerial Council hosted by the Chairperson-in-Office. Half a dozen OSCE summits at the level of Heads of State and Government have been organized mostly during the 1990s, with the last ones being in Astana (2010) and Istanbul (1999). The baskets of the Helsinki Accords have evolved into the OSCE's mandate of three dimensions: the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension. As such, the OSCE's approach to security is one of 'comprehensive security', the idea that security requires more than arms control treaties and diplomatic forums to discuss military matters. The OSCE has thus a very broad scope for a security organization. At the same time—and this has become a cause for considerable contestation, notably by Russia—aspects of the more liberal human dimension have been used by Western states to bring about political change 'east of Vienna', thereby conflicting (from the perspective of Russia) with the core principles from the Decalogue, such as non-intervention in internal affairs (e.g. Galbreath, 2007, pp. 129–130).

One aspect of the OSCE mandate and activities, which is worth highlighting particularly in consideration of the existential challenge discussed below, concerns OSCE (long-term) field missions. With the civil war breaking out in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the OSCE started to deploy (civilian) field missions—in parallel to UN peacekeeping efforts—with the CSCE

Mission to Kosovo, Sandjak, and Vojvodina in 1992 being the first. OSCE missions and offices were soon deployed all over the six former republics of Yugoslavia, but also in the newly independent Soviet states (Baltics, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Caucasus, Central Asia) and Albania (OSCE, 2021a). Over the three decades, the OSCE established more than thirty civilian field missions and offices. In 2003, nearly 900 internationally recruited staff were working for these field activities and another three- to fourfold number of logically recruited staff (OSCE, 2004a, p. 180). By 2020, after the OSCE had closed and scaled down many of its field activities, internationally recruited staff was down to 255 staff (OSCE, 2021b, p. 103).[3] The OSCE has therefore faced a clear downward trend in its field activities (see Dijkstra et al., 2018). This has been particularly challenging for the OSCE as an institution in European security because, as a decentralized IO, many more staff members worked in its field activities than in the Vienna headquarters.

5.2.2 The creation of EU security policy and OSCE contestation by Russia

While the post-Cold War environment set the conditions for the OSCE to be established as an organization and to become more active through its institutions and missions, it also created an opportunity for the EU to develop its own security policy (and for the UN to deploy many more peacekeeping operations and for NATO to deploy troops on missions). During the Cold War, the member states of the European Economic Communities had largely focused on economic integration. Even if they had also tried to coordinate their foreign policies since the 1970s, security and collective defence matters remained the *domaine réservé* of NATO. With the Maastricht Treaty (1993), however, the EU member states established their own Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This resulted eventually in the creation of an operational security policy under the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in 1999 (see Howorth, 2014). From 2003, the EU has started to launch civilian missions under CSDP in Europe, Africa, and Asia. In total, the EU has deployed over twenty civilian missions reaching a record number of 2500 deployed international staff in 2010 (Dijkstra et al., 2018).

   While the CFSP and CSDP were not intentionally created to challenge the OSCE—rather they were a reaction to increasing demands for the EU to act autonomously and militarily in a post-Cold War world where Europe had

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[3] Excluding staff deployed to the extraordinary, and extra-budgetary, Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

failed to respond to the civil wars in Bosnia and Kosovo—they eventually put pressure on the OSCE and became an existential challenge when European countries started to act through the EU channels rather than the OSCE (e.g. Bailes, Haine & Lachowski, 2008; Dunay, 2006; Peters, 2004; Van Willigen & Koops, 2015). The EU and its CSDP machinery were perceived (at least by most EU member states) as more effective, well equipped, and better suited to address conflicts. The EU not just started to deploy its own civilian missions but also took over existing OSCE missions. Civilian CSDP missions were more high profile, better financed, and attracted more easily qualified staff (even if civilian CSDP missions are also understaffed due to a considerable vacancy rate, see Dijkstra et al., 2019), and there was no need for a difficult-to-obtain OSCE consensus with countries such as Russia. What is more, with the successive enlargements of the EU, notably in 2004 and 2007, and the subsequent development of pre-accession and neighbourhood policies for the other countries in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, host countries were increasingly drawn to EU policy instruments rather than the OSCE field activities.

EU security policy started to effectively challenge OSCE field missions in 2008, following the Russian war against Georgia, when the EU established its monitoring mission in Georgia and the OSCE was forced to close its own mission in the country due to a lack of consensus. At around the same time, the EU started to deploy its ambitious rule of law mission in Kosovo (EULEX), which had a considerable police component, thereby overlapping with the police training done under the OSCE mission in Kosovo. While the previous OSCE police training was generally considered effective (Eckhard, 2016), the EU nevertheless moved in. Due to the fraught political situation over the recognition of Kosovo, the OSCE mission was considerably downgraded with tasks being taken over by the EU. In more recent years, starting with the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the EU and its civilian missions have moved further into traditional OSCE territory. The EU's role is not just more prominent in the Western Balkans countries, even if the OSCE still keeps its missions there, but the EU is now also present in Ukraine, Moldova, and Armenia through its CSDP missions. Beyond CSDP, the EU has also become a key focal institution for countries in the region, not in the least place with most being offered EU candidate status in 2022 and 2023.

Contrary to some of the other cases in this book, where states are consciously challenging the incumbent IOs through establishing new institutions (AIIB and IRENA, see Chapters 3 and 4), understanding how EU security policy erodes the OSCE requires us to also consider the more direct and simultaneous challenges of the OSCE by Russia. Both come together. EU

security (and enlargement) policy offers an alternative model for security in Europe, while Russia has caused gridlock in the OSCE and reduced the effectiveness of the field operations. The EU still provides considerable support for the OSCE—politically through declarations, participation in meetings, and liaison but also in terms of extrabudgetary funds—yet this does not make the situation for the OSCE any easier. With the serious existential challenges at the Vienna headquarters over leadership positions and budgets (see Schuette & Dijkstra, 2023a), the decline in OSCE field activities, including due to the presence of alternative institutions, puts the survival of the OSCE at stake and makes its future the bleakest of all six IOs covered in this book.

5.2.3 The OSCE's response to indirect and direct existential challenges

How did the OSCE institutional actors respond to the development of EU security policy and civilian CSDP missions over time? This section analyses in some depth how the OSCE has tried to carve out a role for itself in European security amongst the increasing presence of the alternative security institutions. It finds very little proactive strategizing by OSCE actors in this regard. The emergence of EU security policy and civilian CSDP is rarely acknowledged in the various OSCE strategies and documents. Only in the 2010s, when the OSCE was already in considerable crisis, the new Secretary-General launched some initiatives aimed at increasing support for the organization and making its operations somewhat more effective. This added up to little in the context of diverging East–West relations. While we therefore find some limited *behavioural adaptation*, overall a strategic response was near absent. To better understand the lack of a strategic response, it is first important to underline that the OSCE scores low on all four institutional features analysed in this book (see Table 5.1 for an overview of findings).

The *leadership* of the OSCE's Secretary-General is institutionally weak. The mandate includes largely administrative and only some limited diplomatic tasks (Greminger, 2021, p. 42). Principally, the Secretary-General acts as the Chief Administrative Officer. He or she also supports and represents the Chairperson-in-Office and serves as the institutional memory of the OSCE across chairpersonships. Formally, the room for manoeuvre of the Secretary-General is thus determined by the respective Chairperson-in-Office. The OSCE Secretary-General merely delivers a report on their

activities during the weekly meetings of the Permanent Council but has no agenda-setting powers in the decision-making bodies (Knill, Eckhardt, & Grohs, 2016, p. 1062). Secretaries-General have usually been diplomats. Lamberto Zannier, the Secretary-General between 2011 and 2017, was an Italian career diplomat before taking up his post at the OSCE. His successor, Thomas Greminger (2017–2020), was a Swiss diplomat and, among others, ambassador to the OSCE. Secretary-General Helga Schmid (2020–2024), also a former German diplomat, was more prominent, having previously been the Secretary-General of the EU's External Action Service.

In terms of *organizational structure*, it has been previously noted that the OSCE was created intentionally as a decentralized IO. As Galbreath (2007) writes about the Paris Charter and the early 1990s, when the CSCE was transformed into the OSCE, '[t]he decision [of the participating States] to have a decentralized organization [with separate offices in Vienna, Warsaw, The Hague and Copenhagen] was a strategy to prevent the development of a large, centralized bureaucracy' (p. 44). This also becomes clear when looking at the imbalance between the secretariat staff in Vienna and the international recruited staff in the field missions. Of the 616 staff members working for the Secretariat and three institutions in 2020, 217 were policy grade international staff at the Vienna headquarters, of which only a part was dedicated to the field missions (OSCE, 2021b, p. 103). In other words, much of the mission planning and support staff were included locally in the missions themselves. Furthermore, the Secretary-General also has no formal control over the three institutions or the field missions, which is a key structural weakness.

In addition to the decentralized nature of the bureaucracy, staff recruitment is also heavily constrained. Exceptionally for such a relatively large IO with hundreds of staff, every single staff position is separately mentioned (function title and grade) in the annual unified budget of the OSCE. This includes positions at headquarters, in the three institutions, and the field missions. The unified budget is obviously subject to consensus and is oftentimes politicized (the OSCE has not been able to adopt a budget for 2022, 2023, and 2024, relying on a roll-over budget that does not get compensated for inflation). Moreover, the OSCE (contrary to the EU, UN, and to some extent NATO) is a non-career organization based on the principle of staff rotation with a term of maximum seven years for internationally recruited staff (shorter for key management posts) (OSCE, n.d.). These restrictions, which also date back to the Paris Charter, impair 'the organization's ability to operate, especially in terms of losing institutional knowledge' (Galbreath, 2007, p. 44).

In terms of *formal competences*, OSCE institutional actors are weak. As noted, the leadership of the organization is with the elected Chairperson-in-Office, which changes every year. The Secretary-General and their officials in the Secretariat provide support to the political agenda of the Chairperson. All decisions, including on the budget and staff but also the establishment of field missions, require consensus among the participating states in the Permanent Council. Tellingly, Bauer et al. (2016, Figure 2.2) rank the OSCE the lowest in terms of autonomy of will and action of the twenty IOs they empirically analysed. Finally, the embeddedness of the OSCE in *external networks* is weak. In terms of its member states, the OSCE only really receives active support from Germany, Austria, Finland, and Switzerland, which as initiators of detente and neutral countries have long underwritten the OSCE's mission. It is not just about active support. Significantly, as Galbreath (2007, p. 129) writes, '[t]here is no doubt that "west of Vienna" knowledge of the OSCE is indeed low', while needless to say 'east of Vienna' the OSCE has become increasingly contested over the last two decades (see further below). While the OSCE has reached out to other IOs and worked on establishing some modest networks with think tanks and academics, this is remotely comparable to the effort of, say, the UNFCCC (see Chapter 4) or even NATO (Section 5.1).

To understand how the EU, through its security policies, eventually challenged the OSCE, it is important to understand the role that the OSCE played in European security during the 1990s. The challenges of newly independent states in Europe and the civil war in former Yugoslavia meant a tremendous task of helping out countries with a transition to liberal democracy, which entailed not just election monitoring but also institutional and civil society building, as well as providing monitoring and conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding. The OSCE was not only uniquely placed to do so—with its inclusive membership (including notably the Russian Federation) and its mandate for collective and comprehensive security—but it is also worth remembering that there existed virtually no other IOs at the time with a mandate for field activities. The UN had done traditional inter-state peacekeeping 'light' during the Cold War (and was developing its activities under *An Agenda for Peace*, UN Secretary-General, 1992), yet the EU and NATO did not do operations at the time with the EU operating only outside the area of security. It was not that the OSCE—not even an organization in the early 1990s—was well prepared, but there was a demand to be filled. As part of the Paris Charter (1990), the participating states set up the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), which would become the first unit in the new Vienna Secretariat. They later added an Operation Planning Centre following the Istanbul Summit (1999) and a Strategic Police Matters Unit in 2001,

which both reflected the extent that the OSCE had become active in field activities.

The creation of CSDP in 1999 was initially not seen as an existential threat to the OSCE.[4] The initial proposals focused on autonomous EU military institutions and capabilities and much of the debate was therefore whether the EU would undermine NATO (e.g. Howorth & Keeler, 2003; Whitman, 2004; Posen, 2006; Hofmann, 2009; see on NATO's responses: Schuette, 2023). The civilian dimension was added later to the CSDP and had a more active and operational dimension than regular OSCE field activities. For instance, the EU planned to develop integrated police units (IPUs), engage in civil administration, and provide civil protection in response to humanitarian disasters (European Council, 2000). This was more based on the UN model and the expansionist model of UN peacekeeping—for instance with the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)—than with the lower spectrum OSCE field activities. In any event, at the turn of the millennium there was plenty to do for every IO including the OSCE. This was the time of the UN Brahimi Report (2000), the return to UN peacekeeping, and the 'golden age' of intervention and state building. At the same time, the EU seemed to develop its civilian CSDP largely ignorant of the OSCE activities (Van Ham, 2006, p. 31; see on early CSDP deployments: Stewart, 2008).

The absence of the emerging CSDP institutions and field missions across OSCE policy documents is striking. In the key *OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century* adopted by the Ministerial Council in December 2003, one year after the EU had deployed its first police mission to Bosnia, where the OSCE also had a parallel mission on the ground, the OSCE simply noted that '[n]o single State or organization can, on its own, meet the challenges facing us today. Co-ordination of the efforts of all relevant organizations is therefore essential' (OSCE, 2003, paragraph 52). It only once mentioned the EU, in a list of various IOs, with which it needs to consult with.

The main challenge that the OSCE was concerned with in the early 2000s came from Russia. Dissatisfied with the role that the OSCE had played during the Chechnya wars (Peters, 2013), the position of Russia towards the OSCE essentially deteriorated from the moment Putin became President in 2000 (Dunay, 2006). The challenge was fourfold (see Ghebali, 2005): Russia objected to the long-term field missions operating relatively autonomously with little control in Vienna, the OSCE double standards for countries

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[4] There was a considerable awareness in the academic community, but it does not come back in any OSCE policy documents or communications (e.g. Peters, 2004; Zagorski, 2002).

'east' and 'west of Vienna', the emphasis on the human dimension, and the marginalization of the OSCE in European security due to advances of the EU and NATO. In the early 2000s, Russia also faced several OSCE setbacks including the closure of the field missions in the Baltic states and the OSCE placing critical remarks on the March 2004 Russian presidential election (ibid.; Zellner, 2005). The OSCE was further considered an agent in the coloured revolutions in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) (Galbreath, 2009; Kropatcheva, 2015). By the summer of 2004, President Putin received the support of various members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which were equally dissatisfied by the human rights emphasis of the OSCE. In response, the OSCE appointed a Panel of Eminent Persons to write a comprehensive report on OSCE reform (Kropatcheva, 2015; Odello, 2005).

The report entitled *Common Purpose: Towards a More Effective OSCE* only partially went into Russia's concerns. It notably did not mention EU security policy once, even if it had a separate section on 'Relations with other international organisations and partners' where it acknowledged that '[b]eing an independent Organization with its distinctive mandate, relations between the OSCE and other international organisations in the European security network should focus on *what the OSCE does best and where its added value lies* [emphasis added]' (OSCE, 2005, paragraph 10d; cf. Van Ham, 2006, p. 32). The report furthermore recommended strengthening the OSCE's identity and profile to raise awareness and visibility. A key aspect in this respect was a proposal to strengthen the role of the Secretary-General vis-à-vis the Chairperson and to allow the Secretary-General to be the public face and take the organizational lead (Odello, 2005).[5]

The situation for the OSCE went quickly sideways. In 2007, President Putin addressed the Munich Security Conference, noting that '[p]eople are trying to transform the OSCE into a vulgar instrument designed to promote the foreign policy interests of one or a group of countries' (President of Russia, 2007). In the same year, it suspended its participation in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which while formally separate from the OSCE was a cornerstone of the OSCE rationale. In 2008, following the NATO Bucharest Summit, which discussed the potential NATO accession of Georgia and Ukraine, Russia militarily invaded Georgia, thereby putting common security in Europe at serious risk. The hastily negotiated

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[5] In December 2004, the Ministerial Council had already clarified the role of the Secretary-General including giving the mandate to make public statements for the organization (OSCE, 2004b). The fact that until then the role of the Secretary-General was underdefined but also that the Secretary-General would not publicly communicate shows the structural weaknesses of this office.

peace plan by the French President Sarkozy, who held the EU presidency at the time, included a civilian monitoring mission by the EU through the CSDP. The parallel OSCE Mission to Georgia was closed in December 2008 when Russia refused to prolong its mandate.

While the war in Georgia directly touched upon the OSCE mandate, also in 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia. Following the 1999 war and the settlement under UN Security Council Resolution 1244, the OSCE had led on democratization and institutional building in Kosovo under the UNMIK framework. As part of the Ahtisaari Plan for Kosovo Status Settlement (2007), the UN framework would be gradually replaced by various EU instruments including the EULEX mission (see Dijkstra, 2011). In the absence of an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, however, Russia blocked consensus in the Security Council resulting in a Western-backed unilateral move by Kosovo. This put in motion the deployment of EULEX, which became fully operational in 2009. Yet because of a lack of formal settlement, it was difficult to reduce, let alone terminate, UNMIK and OMIK and/or establish working relations between these missions. Indeed, Russia insisted on the continued presence of OMIK (Eckhard & Dijkstra, 2017).

The war in Georgia did spur some renewed initiatives in thinking about European security. Already prior to the war, and as an attempt to starve of NATO enlargement, the then Russian President Medvedev had proposed to renegotiate the very foundation of the European security system, and with it the OSCE. His proposal of a European Security Treaty included a call for transforming the OSCE into a 'fully fledged regional organization' endowed with a legal personality (Platise & Peters, 2019). At the heart of the Russian proposal were, first, a return to the traditional noninterference principle by curtailing the autonomy of the OSCE's institutions and, second, the elevation of the role of Russia in European security affairs by shifting decision-making away from NATO and the EU to an organization where Russia was represented. While the Western states signalled willingness to discuss some modest reforms of the OSCE, neither the United States nor key European members like Germany were willing to renegotiate the liberal foundations of the OSCE, and hence, to Russian frustration, the reform efforts petered out (Peters, 2013, pp. 203–206). The OSCE Summit in Astana (December 2010), the first one since Istanbul (1999) and the last one on record, resulted in little.

Some initiatives for behavioural adaptation now did finally come from the Secretary-General (see further Schuette & Dijkstra, 2023a). The new Secretary-General Zannier (2011–2017) initiated two institutional reforms. In 2011, he led efforts to create the 'OSCE Network' of think tanks and academic institutions, thereby trying to embed the OSCE better in an external

network of like-minded actors. The idea was that this epistemic community would provide policy expertise on subjects relevant to the OSCE policy fields and serves to partially offset the lack of strategic capacity and expertise resulting from the Secretariat's constrained resources (Interview #C28; see also Knill, Eckhardt, & Grohs, 2016, p. 1065).[6] In addition, Zannier launched the Security Days in 2012, which convened a wide array of stakeholders to engage in informal dialogue on pertinent subjects. The Security Days were thus intended to circumvent formal fora that were largely blocked and set the agenda in order to generate new ideas for the OSCE's traditional roles and showcase its potential to play a meaningful role in emerging issues (Zannier, 2018, p. 36; Interview #C19). While these were thus clear attempts to develop further support for the OSCE and a case of behavioural adaptation, these external networks cannot be compared to, for instance, the case of the UNFCCC (see Chapter 4) or even NATO discussed in this book.

Successor Secretary-General Greminger (2017–2020) aimed to be a more proactive and influential leader. Upon coming into office, he set out on an ambitious institutional reform agenda. Among the first decisions of his tenure was to create the Strategic Policy Support Unit (SPSU). In his previous post as Swiss OSCE Ambassador in 2014, Greminger had noted that the Secretariat was completely absorbed in daily files and lacked a central structure tasked with crafting medium- and long-term strategy (Greminger, 2021, p. 25). Faced with opposition from some participating states, Greminger had to rely on extrabudgetary funding to attract five officials seconded from key participating states. The unit was subsequently involved in developing regional strategies for Central Asia or the Western Balkans and helped draft the policy priorities for the Slovak and Albanian chairpersonships (Interview #C20). As such, establishing the policy unit was an attempt to increase the autonomy and functional capacity of the Secretariat (Interviews #C22, #C27). The SPSU also played a central role in drafting the ambitious Fit4Purpose reform agenda to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the OSCE and to reform the Secretariat (see Greminger, 2021, p. 32ff.). In addition to these technical reforms, the Secretary-General also proposed political changes. Most importantly, he advocated to change the budgetary cycle by moving from an annual to a biannual budget.

In an attempt to boost the capacity of the Secretariat and the institutions, Greminger also suggested revising the staffing rules by extending the maximum duration of service both for officials and directors, as well as offering the

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[6] The first author of this book sat on the Steering Committee of this OSCE network in the years 2022 and 2023. At the end of 2023, the network was terminated due to insufficient consensus within the OSCE.

possibility of returning to the organization after a cooling-off period. However, both potentially consequential reforms failed to materialize. Yet again, the hurdle of consensus requirements was too high for institutional reforms. Several interviewees, however, also noted that beyond the weak institutional authority of his position, Greminger himself lacked the necessary political access in capitals and was insufficiently transparent and consultative about his political reforms, both vis-à-vis participating states and other institutions (Interviews #C23, #C24, #C27). Reflecting the fragmentation of the OSCE, there was a widespread suspicion among officials in the institutions that Greminger's agenda was motivated less by efficiency concerns and more by a desire to 'centralize power' (Interview #C29).

Somewhat counterintuitively, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and occupation of large parts of Eastern Ukraine in 2014 created some momentum for the OSCE. In response, the OSCE launched its largest ever monitoring mission, which was so sizeable that it creatively required an extraordinary budget. While this was a massive undertaking for the OSCE, which was pulled off very quickly, as the years passed by and the status quo on the ground did not change, the OSCE mission was heavily criticized (foremost by Ukraine) for not achieving results (Härtel, Pisarenko, & Umland, 2021; Neukirch, 2015). The monitoring mission was terminated in 2022 shortly after Russia's full-fledged war on Ukraine. The closure of the monitoring mission does not stand on itself. Since the mid-2010s, many host countries (in Central Asia and the Caucasus) have consistently refused to renew the mandates of OSCE field missions. As a result, many missions have been terminated or turned into much smaller 'programme offices'. With a few exceptions in the Western Balkans, in terms of field missions there is not much OSCE activity left.

5.2.4 Outcome of the challenge to the OSCE

Originally a Cold War institution, the OSCE significantly benefitted from the opportunities that the post-Cold War presented. Newly independent states needed to transition into democracies, and various (frozen) conflicts in former Yugoslavia but also in the former Soviet Union were in need of comprehensive security measures. While during the 1990s, the OSCE became a prominent actor in European security through its range of field operations, it essentially lost that position during the 2000s and 2010s. Other IOs, notably the EU with its civilian CSDP missions, also developed field operations. And the OSCE itself was increasingly caught up in post-Cold War

politics including contestation and hostility from a reemerging Russia. There is a truth to the statement that the OSCE concerns itself with the 'leftovers' from EU, NATO, and UN policies and common security in less-than-priority regions (Borchert & Maurer, 2004).

The institutional actors of the OSCE are structurally weak. Throughout the decades, we have identified very little strategic leadership and proactive behaviour. For a long time, the OSCE did not seriously acknowledge the existential challenges it was facing. EU CSDP missions are very rarely mentioned in official documents, and self-legitimation typically involves long speeches listing all the diverse OSCE activities throughout its fifty-seven participating states (see, e.g. Schuette & Dijkstra, 2023a). Despite increasingly heavy contestation from Russia, the OSCE does not have many proactive supporters 'west of Vienna' either. Key supporters of the OSCE have been few, with Germany and neutral Austria, Finland, and Switzerland often having to take the initiatives and pick up the bill through extrabudgetary contributions.

The lack of sufficient (re)legitimation practices has resulted in an outcome where the OSCE is not just stuck to the status quo and has become increasingly gridlocked, but is also in decline (cf. Reus-Smit, 2007, p. 167). The OSCE has witnessed a clear reduction in the willingness, mostly by its participating states, to engage in political discussions, pool resources, or comply with collective decisions. This comes from Russia and other CIS states no longer being willing to host field missions or welcome election monitors, eroding other liberal norms, and obstructing political and budgetary processes in Vienna. But equally, Western states have given less-and-less priority to the OSCE as opposed to other institutions such as the EU, often not pushing back against delegitimation attempts of the organization.

So how does decline precisely look like in the case of the OSCE? First, the most evident expression of participating states' lack of diffuse support for the organization is its loss of budget. Whereas in 2000, the nominal unified budget amounted to EUR 209 million, by 2021 it had been reduced to EUR 138 million (though this excluded the budget of the SMM of around EUR 108 million). Given that the 2022, 2023, and 2024 budgets have not been adopted, the OSCE operates on a monthly rollover budget, not compensating for the considerable inflation across the OSCE countries. OSCE officials note that the budgetary pressures on both the Secretariat and ODIHR are 'completely unsustainable' (Interview #C21, also #C25, #C27, #C29). At ODIHR, the staff-to-non-staff cost ratio has reached 80:20, with the result that the institution must selectively observe elections, thereby inviting criticism of a Western bias, especially by participating states 'east of Vienna'. In the Secretariat, the budgetary pressures significantly limit regular trips to the field

missions by senior officials, aggravating the fragmentation among OSCE institutions (Interview #C27).

Second, the policy scope has, de facto, shrunk. While the OSCE is nominally charged with tasks reaching from arms control and military confidence building (first dimension), economic and environmental issues (second dimension), and human rights policy and democracy promotion (third dimension), peripheral issues dominate its agenda, as almost all sensitive files are blocked by participating states (Zellner, 2020). The crown jewel of the OSCE—the SMM—was forced to close in April 2022 after Russia vetoed its extension. The OSCE has also struggled to adapt to emerging security threats arising from climate change or new technologies (Interview #C24). Third, and accordingly, the policy output has reduced. No summit of heads of state and government has taken place since 2010, and the annual ministerial councils rarely produce substantive decisions. In 2020, the combination of opposition by some member states and indifference by others culminated in the leadership crisis of 2020 and rendered the organization rudderless and impotent for four months, when the four most senior institutional positions, including that of the Secretary-General, remained vacant. And fourth, political attention among participating states towards the OSCE has been shifting to other IOs like the EU and NATO or European Political Community, but also the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which have expanded their domains at the expense of the OSCE (Cooley & Nexon, 2020, p. 118ff.; Donno, 2024).

In other words, in the case of the OSCE, decline manifests itself in (a) a reduced policy scope, (b) less high-level meetings between the participating states and with other relevant actors and less output, (c) vacant leadership positions and insufficient administrative budget, and (d) selective and closed field operations and missions. Also, in terms of relative decline, we can observe important developments, including (e) less political buy-in and attention by key participating states and (f) more interest in competing international institutions. What we have not seen in the OSCE is the withdrawal of participating states, even if the withdrawal, suspension, and/or expulsion of Russia have been repeatedly mentioned throughout 2022 (by Russia itself and also by Western states).

5.3 Conclusion

This is the final empirical chapter of this book analysing why institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges. It has focused on

two case studies: NATO and the OSCE (see Table 5.1 for an overview of the findings). While NATO was directly challenged by the United States, or more precisely President Trump, the OSCE's role in engaging in various field activities was eroded indirectly by the emergence of the EU as a security actor as well as more direct forms of contestation by Russia. In this conclusion to the chapter, we summarize and compare the findings of both case studies.

The first case study on NATO tried to make sense of the very proactive strategic responses by NATO institutional actors, notably the Secretary-General, following the election of Donald Trump as the U.S. President in December 2016. While on paper, the NATO Secretary-General and his International Staff lack serious authority, we surprisingly found them to be amongst the most strategic of all the IO institutional actors studied in this book. When taking indeed a closer look at the institutional features of NATO actors, we find considerable abilities for them to strategically respond. Contrary to any of the other IOs in this book (and most IOs worldwide), the NATO Secretary-General is a former head of government, which comes with a significant degree of leadership potential. The NATO International Staff, which falls under his authority, is also sizeable with several relevant divisions and units to craft strategic responses. The NATO Secretary-General has crucial agenda-shaping powers, and NATO is a cornerstone of the Euro-Atlantic security establishment, thereby embedding the organization's core networks. During the Trump presidency, NATO actors used their resources wisely on burden-sharing and Russia policy. Through discursive adaptation, they placated Trump and through behavioural resistance, they ringfenced the President. As such, NATO has come out of the Trump presidency relatively unshattered.

The second case study on the OSCE presents the opposite. OSCE institutional actors did very little and could do very little to properly respond to deteriorating East–West relations with the participating states 'west of Vienna' investing in other institutions, notably EU security policy and the various CSDP field missions, and participating states 'east of Vienna' (principally Putin's Russia) eroding OSCE mandates over time. OSCE actors hardly recognized these types of challenges, focusing on self-legitimation, until it was too late. Some attempts at behavioural adaptation during the early 2010s did not affect the OSCE's downward trajectory. At the time of writing in 2024, the OSCE field missions had been drastically reduced in number and even more so in resources. The organization was barely surviving with no agreed annual budgets and key personnel positions being on hold. When looking at the abilities of OSCE actors, these findings do not come as surprising. OSCE institutional actors are notoriously weak with

the Secretary-General being heavily dependent on the elected Chairperson and with only limited authority over the already decentralized organization. Formal competences barely exist with the OSCE remaining principally a consensus-based member-driven forum for consultation and the OSCE is not significantly embedded in larger networks.

The findings of this chapter provide strong evidence for the argument pursued in this book—that the ability of IO institutional actors to effectively use their resources, through leadership, organizational structure, formal competences, and external networks matters for their ability to strategically craft responses to existential challenges (Proposition 2, see Chapter 2). Both NATO and OSCE are security IOs driven by their member states. In this chapter's introduction, they have been characterized as least-likely cases for strategic responses by institutional actors. The case of the OSCE indeed conforms with these expectations with little agency to fight for survival. The example of NATO provides, however, a serious challenge to the conventional understanding of security IOs. As noted now repeatedly, NATO institutional actors were among the most proactive ones in this book to respond to existential challenges, at least on par with the World Bank. To understand this variation between NATO and the OSCE, it is critical to take a good look at both IO's institutional features. Even if NATO is often described in the literature simplistically as institutionally weak, when assessing the relevant institutional variations of this book, one can only conclude that NATO actors do have considerable agency to respond. Those pundits who merely consider NATO an alliance of states facing outside threats, rather than an IO, have been repeatedly wrong since the end of the Cold War.

Striking in this chapter was also how IO institutional actors tailored their responses to the type of existential challenges (Proposition 1, see Chapter 2). The case of NATO is noteworthy. The chapter has highlighted how NATO actors addressed the different existential challenges and fired at the Alliance by Trump differently. Transatlantic burden-sharing is a core interest of NATO and its institutional actors. The Alliance is not sustainable in the long term, if Europeans continue to rely for their security on the United States. By engaging with Trump, NATO institutional actors thus found a way to put further pressure on European allies, even if the strategic responses were more discursive than ultimately behavioural—European allies would likely have increased defence spending even under a Democratic U.S. President. At the same time, NATO actors could not agree with Trump on Russia policy, which threatened the whole rationale underlying the Alliance. That they crafted thus a different type of response of behavioural resistance is

evidence of how IO institutional actors can be inventive and strategic if they have sufficient resources as well as the right abilities to respond.

As with the previous chapters, this empirical chapter has tried to explain the varied responses by NATO and the OSCE to existential challenges. It has not tried to explain outcomes. For Donald Trump, it would probably have been difficult to actually withdraw the United States from NATO given domestic U.S. constraints. In the case of the OSCE, deteriorating relations between East and West would probably have made it difficult for institutional actors—however strong—to make a serious dent. It is nonetheless apparent that there is a significant association between the responses of institutional actors in NATO and the OSCE and the outcomes of the existential challenges. NATO is still around and the Russian war against Ukraine has made the Alliance ever more important. For all the risks that NATO continues to face in the medium term, NATO institutional actors have clearly done their bit to strengthen the Alliance. In the case of the OSCE, the situation is much more dire. The organization has been on a pathway to decline for a while and it flirts with becoming a 'zombie' IO.

Following these three empirical chapters, Chapter 6 of this book will outline again the main argument and provide a comparative analysis and discussion of all the six IOs studied in this book. It also considers the consequences for the survival of IOs in the coming decades.

6
Conclusion

As we were writing the conclusion of this book in the summer of 2024 at the end of our five-year research project on the topic of the decline and death of IOs, Donald Trump had just been nominated candidate for the presidential elections at the Republican convention. The Russian war against Ukraine continued in full earnest with no obvious solution in sight. During his first post-Covid visit to the United States, President Xi noted that China will reunify with Taiwan ultimately by 2049, if not earlier (the centenary of the People's Republic). Meanwhile, the EU member states—the self-proclaimed protagonists of multilateralism and rules-based global order—split three ways during votes in the UN General Assembly on the war between Israel and Hamas. These momentous developments, which blur the lines between the domestic and international, have serious implications for how the world will be governed in the next decades of the 21st century. In Chapter 1, we provided various examples of IOs facing existential challenges in the last 10–15 years; the coming decades will likely be worse.

It is relatively easy to list the existential challenges that the various IOs currently face or in the (near) future. Realists and domestic politics scholars have already done so repeatedly (see Chapter 1 for reference). It is obvious that the rising powers, notably China, will have their run-ins with the many incumbent international institutions that have institutionalized the post-war and post-Cold War order. It is also clear, and for everyone to see, that American voters no longer fully embrace U.S. leadership around the globe, particularly if it involves 'blood and treasure'. At the same time, existential challenges to IOs are hardly deterministic. When IOs get challenged, outcomes are rarely predetermined. Furthermore, even if existential challenges are on the rise, the world still needs to be governed, or at least managed. Climate change and digital technologies, but also migration and taxation, with people and companies continuing to be on the move, and the need for at least some basic collective security, underscore that there remains a strong demand for IOs and other international institutions. This makes it even more important to study IOs, their agency, and their responsiveness and survival.

This book started off with the observation that while the academic literature discusses many of the challenges that IOs face, scant attention is paid to the IOs themselves. When existentially challenged, IOs are implicitly portrayed as both victims and hapless bystanders as international and domestic politics unfold. This book has therefore instead focused on what IOs *do* in the face of existential challenges. As noted in Chapter 1, the book is about the Secretaries-General, Director-Generals, and Executive Secretaries who lead their organizations. And it is equally about the middle managers and the desk officers, who keep the machinery running, within the directorates of the international secretariats of IOs. The book has thus been about the people behind the facades of IOs: the IO officials who are institutional actors in their own right and those who have the most to lose when their organizations go on a pathway of decline. Working within institutional constraints and with the resources that they have, the book has sought to explain why these institutional actors, who serve principally the IO rather than member state interests, respond differently when their own livelihood gets threatened.

Providing comparative case studies of six IOs and original data from 114 interviews, the book has gone beyond the official documents and public debates. It has uncovered important behind-the-scenes processes about the survival of IOs. As a main takeaway, the book shows that IO institutional actors have responded rather differently to existential challenges. First, they have tried to tailor their responses to the different types of existential challenges. Direct existential challenges by powerful states were met with responses of resistance, while indirect challenges with states acting through alternative institutions resulted in responses of adaptation. Second, the ability of IO institutional actors to proactively formulate as well as implement strategic responses has been dependent on their own institutional features, notably their leadership. This book thus highlights that IO institutional actors need to be studied closely when examining the existential challenges to IOs.

In this concluding chapter, we will provide a recap of the research question and our argument. We will then delve into the findings mainly through a comparison of the six case studies analysed in Chapters 3–5. We will continue with a discussion of what these comparative findings mean for our understanding of IOs and ongoing academic research. Finally, we will conclude with some implications for the survival of IOs in the coming decades.

6.1 The question and the argument

Before going to the findings of this book and the comparison of the case studies, it is worth restating the research question, the puzzle that informed the question, and our main argument, all discussed in more detail in Chapters 1 and 2. As we noted in Chapter 1, scholars not just pay insufficient attention to IO responses to existential challenges but also that those responses vary a great deal. Some IOs—such as NATO, the EU and the World Bank—have proactively dealt with challenges in ways that have consolidated their organizations. Others—such as the OSCE and WTO—have been less responsive and have seen their central position in international relations decline.

Particularly puzzling is that the chosen responses by IOs have also varied greatly. We noted, in Chapter 1, how the European Commission appointed Michel Barnier as a high-level politician to keep unity among the remaining EU member states in the wake of the Brexit referendum and to collectively resist British demands. The World Bank leadership, on the other hand, took a much more accommodating perspective on the creation of the AIIB and reached out to shape this China-led institution in its own image. While the Bank was equally proactive, the type of response thus differed. Other IOs, we noted, were far less proactive in developing strategic responses. For instance, the WTO Director-General did little to address the looming crisis of the Appellate Body and the OSCE Secretaries-General were also rather modest in dealing with the 'polycrisis' that the organization faced since the late-2000s. We have also mentioned the example of the UNFCCC, which did not take much action itself when Trump announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, but rather indirectly relied on its external network of like-minded actors that it had previously helped develop.

Throughout the book, we have seen instances of behavioural responses and discursive responses by IO institutional actors. We have seen resistance to existential challenges and also adaptation. And we have seen the absence of meaningful strategic responses. In the book, we have therefore tried to answer the research question *why do the institutional actors of IOs respond differently to existential challenges?* Existential challenges are those that specifically put individual IOs at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out some of their core functions. Existential challenges are thus not deterministic and full IO termination is not the only possible outcome. Existential challenges can also put part of the functions at risk. Institutional actors are defined as those actors who serve principally the IO institution rather than a particular

interest. They include IO leaders and their bureaucracies; they do not include the member states meeting in the plenary organs, executive boards, or other IO organs.

There are many different sorts of existential challenges to consider when studying IOs. Wars and conflict occasionally break out between member states, economic and financial crises may put international cooperation under pressure, power transitions between states challenge status quo institutions, cooperation problems may change over time, gridlock and bureaucratic inertia can create inefficiencies, and domestic politics and popular protest may undermine legitimacy or the right to rule. In this book, we have focused on two specific types of existential challenges that put IOs potentially at risk. The first type concerns *direct* challenges by powerful states. Powerful member states or powerful groups of member states are those that have outside alternatives and are vitally important to the functioning of IOs. If they start seriously increasing their demands or reducing their support, IOs are likely to be in trouble. The second type concerns *indirect* challenges where states establish or act through competing IOs or other international institutions. When competing institutions take over part of the mandates and responsibilities of IOs, this in turn may erode also the resource base of those IOs. This can result in a situation where IOs are at risk of no longer carrying out some of their core functions. We therefore have limited ourselves to state-driven challenges that have a clear effect on IOs.

In terms of explaining the varied responses by IO institutional actors to these two types of challenges, our starting point has been that institutional actors play a central role in the lifecycle of IOs (e.g. Hall, 2016; Johnson, 2014; Littoz-Monnet, 2021; Weinlich, 2014; Young, 1991). We have argued that institutional actors are not only consequential actors in the design and development but also play a role with regard to the decline and even dissolution of IOs (e.g. Mumby, 2023 on the League of Nations). In fact, existential challenges are permissive of extraordinary behaviour by institutional actors. In normal times, IO institutional actors may face internal bureaucratic politics over limited resources and can be slow-moving. But if survival is at stake, their interests are likely to be more focused. These insights can be derived from public administration scholarship (e.g. Kaufman, 1976) but are also increasingly prominent in the field of IOs (e.g. Kreuder-Sonnen, 2019; Schuette, 2024; Stone, 2011; Strange, 1998).

Throughout this book, we have argued that the responses of institutional actors within IOs to existential challenges can be grouped along two dimensions. Institutional actors can help their IOs *adapt* to cope with existential challenges or try to *resist* and counter such pressures. Institutional

actors can adopt, in this regard, both *behavioural* and *discursive* strategies (Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2022; Hirschmann, 2021; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019; see also Barnett & Coleman, 2005; Chorev, 2012; Kruck & Zangl, 2020). Institutional actors can, for instance, initiate reforms and facilitate compromise between the challenger states and the rest of the membership (adapt; behavioural). They can use agenda-setting or discretion in implementation to counter challenges and/or build coalitions with like-minded member states and non-state actors (resist; behavioural). They can use discursive strategies through their communication departments for issue framing and creating momentum for reform (adapt; discursive) or go on a public relations offensive in support of the legitimation of their organizations (resist; discursive). These are not mutually exclusive strategies. IOs can be accommodating in terms of discourse but quietly resist meaningful behavioural change. Overall, institutional actors have a considerable toolkit potentially available to cope with and counter existential challenges.

Because IO institutional actors can formulate and implement different responses to existential challenges, we expect them to tailor their response strategically depending on the exact type of challenge (Proposition 1, see Chapter 2). We proposed that institutional actors are more likely to resist than adapt in order to cope with the direct challenges of powerful states, because accommodation risks eroding IO mandates and opens up opportunities for other member states to make their demands (e.g. Walter, 2021). On the other hand, resisting indirect challenges through alternative institutions is likely to be difficult for IO institutional actors, as the creation of alternative institutions poses considerable costs for those member states and therefore presents a serious signal about the need to adapt. In other words, different types of challenges logically demand different responses.

The type of challenge, however, only presents half of the story. Important in our theoretical argument is also that the ability of IO institutional actors to respond varies (Proposition 2, see Chapter 2). Even if the IO institutional actors studied in our book have serious latent resources, notably in terms of staff, their actual abilities to respond may be heavily constrained. We have argued, in this respect, that the IO leadership by Secretaries-General, Directors-General, and Executive Secretaries is a key variable (Chesterman, 2007; Hall & Woods, 2018; Hendrickson, 2006; Kille & Scully, 2003; Schroeder, 2014). When it comes to existential challenges, there needs to be direction from the top. This starts with IO leaders recognizing the challenge and taking the lead in formulating a response. While some IO leaders will be more hands-on, skilled, and can rely on (personal) authority and networks or their public profile, others might not consider the challenges existential

until it is too late. Some existential challenges lead to acute crises, while others are more slow-burning or creeping (e.g. Boin et al., 2020), which makes the recognition of existential crises less than guaranteed. Some IOs may have also experienced similar types of crises before and possess experience in how to address them.

Once institutional actors in IOs recognize existential challenges, the key question becomes how to respond. We have built on the study of IO agency and international public administration (e.g. Beach, 2004; Biermann & Siebenhüner, 2009; Eckhard & Ege, 2016; Ege, Bauer, & Wagner, 2021; Hawkins et al., 2006; Pollack, 2003) to identify three further features, beyond IO leadership, that can help to explain variation in the responses of institutional actors. First, IO leaders should have authority over their bureaucracies, which is not always the case in fragmentated IO structures. We have thus proposed that organizational structure matters for strategic responses. Second, within the IO, institutional actors that possess stronger formal competences (agenda-setting or decision-making authority or a strong role in implementation) are likely to be able to develop more proactive strategic responses. Finally, in our theoretical framework, we have proposed that institutional actors well embedded in external networks are in a better position to secure support from like-minded actors for their responses to existential challenges. Together with leadership, we have argued that these institutional features help to explain why institutional actors respond differently.

Our argument, in which institutional actors can (under conditions) proactively respond and tailor their responses to different types of existential challenges, sets us apart from the extant literature. To the extent that scholars consider IOs and the role of institutional actors at all when it concerns existential challenges, in the literature, IOs are normally considered slow-moving, sticky, and path-dependent organizations, gridlocked by veto-players and bureaucratic inertia. We have challenged this assumption. Indeed, in this book, we have argued that IO institutional actors tend to be up-front and centre when their organizations get challenged. They have to work within institutional constraints and with the resources at their disposal, but they can be the most motivated and proactive supporters in fighting for IO survival.

6.2 Comparison of the case studies

So how does this argument hold up across our six case studies? The empirical chapters have shown that some IO institutional actors are remarkably

proactive and strategically tailor their responses to the types of existential challenges, while institutional actors in other IOs are much less proactive and provide delayed and more limited responses. The variation across the six cases can be explained, first of all, by the type of existential challenge. While institutional actors have largely opted for resistance to direct challenges from powerful states, they have used more adaptation strategies to cope with indirect challenges through alternative challenger institutions. Second, a comparison of the case studies highlights the importance of the abilities of institutional actors to respond. IO leadership has turned out as a critical feature to explain variation. Organizational structure is important for strategic responses, while embeddedness in external networks provides a surprising source of support for institutional actors. The formal competences are less important throughout the case studies.

6.2.1 The findings

In order to compare and discuss the findings, it is fruitful to first go again through each of the case studies. The *World Bank* and *NATO* are, in this regard, the two case studies where we found the most proactive responses by institutional actors. When the World Bank, after a range of criticisms by the rising powers, faced the creation of the AIIB (and the New Development Bank), it did not sit back. The entrant AIIB could potentially not just take over part of the project portfolio dealing with infrastructure but also undercut some of the established norms in the field of development lending. The World Bank, particularly under the leadership of its President Kim, engaged in a proactive response of behavioural adaptation. It strengthened its role as a norm-setter, legitimator, and knowledge-producer within the global development arena, and it leveraged that role as it reached out to the AIIB to help the new institution develop (through staff exchanges and co-financing joint projects where it acted as the leading partner). In engaging in adaptation, the World Bank benefitted from a clear structure, considerable competences, and a recognition of its central position in development networks.

While NATO is a different organization from the World Bank, active in a different policy field, and faced a different type of existential challenge with President Trump directly challenging the Alliance in terms of burden-sharing and Russia policy (therefore most-different cases), it formulated and implemented a similarly proactive response. Combining discursive adaptation on burden-sharing with behavioural resistance on Russia policy, NATO institutional actors under Secretary-General Stoltenberg strategically used

Trump on issues of NATO interest, while ringfencing Trump on other challenges. Given that security alliances, such as NATO, because of their very limited formal competences are often considered least-likely cases for institutional actors, these strategic responses have been surprising. The NATO case study has made clear, above all, the importance of IO leadership with Stoltenberg. It has also pointed at the embedding of NATO within the broader Euro-Atlantic security establishment, which includes many actors in the U.S. federal government.

The cases of the World Bank and NATO contrast with the cases of the *UNFCCC* and the *IEA*, both of which strategically responded to existential challenges but less proactively and in more circumvent ways than the former IOs. The case of the UNFCCC and the U.S. withdrawal is interesting in that UNFCCC officials had dealt with the United States before. Following the U.S. non-ratification of the previous Kyoto Protocol, and more importantly, the troubled COP meeting in Copenhagen in 2009, UNFCCC institutional actors had become more proactive in reaching out to like-minded actors—states but also sub-state and civil society actors—and building a strong network around the organization and the Paris Agreement. Once the United States announced the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement under President Trump, this network largely activated itself in support of climate action. It was therefore a strong indirect way of behavioural and discursive resistance in which the UNFCCC responded to this existential challenge. As many different actors came out in favour of the Paris Agreement and climate action, no other member states withdrew following the U.S. example and the United States under President Biden could easily rejoin the Paris Agreement.

While the response of the UNFCCC to Trump was indirect through the external network, the adaptation of the IEA to the increasingly important demands of climate change was delayed. The IEA initially resisted an expansion of its scope beyond fossil fuels and an expansion of its membership beyond the members of the parent-OECD. As such, it stood by as three of its own member states initiated the creation of IRENA with a mandate for renewable energy and universal membership in 2009. Only after a change of leadership, when Executive Director Birol was appointed in 2015, and with the important parallel adoption of the Paris Agreement, did the IEA expand its own scope to include climate action. This behavioural adaptation came about through institutional layering with the new tasks and additional bureaucratic resources put on top of existing ones. The IEA also engaged more with non-OECD countries by offering associate membership and started to reach out to other relevant IOs, thereby strengthening its

external network. As a result of these adaptations, the IEA has come out as a stronger actor and has maintained its central position in the international energy regime.

The final two case studies, the *WTO* and the *OSCE*, stand out as examples where institutional actors barely responded to existential challenges. While both IOs continue to survive (the WTO more so than the OSCE), they have declined considerably over the last decades and no longer hold the central position in international relations they once had. The case of the WTO is most straightforward. Its Appellate Body had already been contested, but the Trump administration took it to a new level by systematically blocking the appointment of all judges. As the judges' terms ran out, the Appellate Body ultimately became inoperable. WTO institutional actors did little to respond to this challenge. WTO leadership was weak with Director-General Azevêdo thinking that he should stay impartial in a member-driven IO. The Appellate Body is also a decentralized entity within the broader WTO Secretariat, over which the Director-General has little authority. The WTO furthermore had only limited support in the United States, with the Republicans and Democrats being surprisingly in unison on the Appellate Body. Tellingly, the Biden administration has not resumed the process of appointing new judges. Interestingly, the main initiative to keep trade adjudication alive came from the EU (not the WTO Secretariat), which initiated the MPIA with some other key trading partners such as China as a temporary arrangement.

The existential challenges to the OSCE are more pluriform and ultimately have to do with the emergence of the EU as a security actor, EU enlargement, and the deteriorating East–West relations. The OSCE played a key role in providing comprehensive security with field missions all over the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia between the early 1990s and the mid-2000s. During the 2000s, however, the EU started to develop its own, often better funded and more visible civilian CSDP missions, mostly in the Western Balkans, while Russia under President Putin started to object to OSCE activities notably its human dimension. The turning point was the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo and the war in Georgia (both in 2008), when the EU stepped in with CSDP missions while the OSCE mission in Kosovo became gridlocked and the OSCE mission in Georgia was terminated. Throughout the case analysis, we have identified very few responses by OSCE institutional actors. In the official documents and speeches, they barely talked about these existential challenges. In the 2010s, the new Secretaries-General did try some modest behavioural adaptation through the creation of an external expert network and proposing some institutional reforms. It did not add up to much. By the time of writing, following

the Russian war against Ukraine, the OSCE was most at risk of becoming a 'zombie IO' or even termination.

6.2.2 Explaining responses by institutional actors

The comparison of the six case studies thus highlights considerable variation in the types of responses by IO institutional actors as well as their abilities to respond. World Bank and NATO actors have been proactive in their strategic responses, UNFCCC and IEA actors more indirect and belated, and WTO and OSCE actors have largely failed to respond. IO institutional actors have tried to tailor their responses to the type of challenges, particularly if they had the ability to respond strategically. How do we explain why institutional actors respond differently to these existential challenges?

It is worth starting off with the *different types of existential challenges* and how these determine the response options for institutional actors (Proposition 1, see Chapter 2). In the book, we have distinguished between direct challenges by powerful states and indirect challenges where states or groups of states act through the creation of alternative competing institutions. Based on the literature, we have argued that direct challenges by powerful states may put institutional actors in a dilemma. Powerful states, by the very definition, have outside options and can leave IOs struggling when they withdraw their support; accommodating powerful states may result in other member states also making demands as well as the erosion of the core rationale of IOs. We therefore proposed that behavioural and discursive adaptation are likely unpalatable options for IO institutional actors facing direct existential challenges. This is also what we, by and large, find in the empirical case studies. NATO, UNFCCC, and WTO actors have been averse to adapting their IOs to the demands of the Trump administration and have rather opted for strategies of resistance. While NATO actors obviously provided an even more tailored strategy (along with discursive and behavioural adaptive strategies on burden sharing) and WTO actors failed to put forward a clear response, the overall response to Trump by these three IOs was more on the side of resistance and maintaining the status quo than giving in or adaptation.

In contrast, indirect existential challenges coming from newly created alternative institutions were mostly met with adaptation (even if there was resistance in the short term). For member states to go outside established IOs and put considerable political expense into setting up new institutions shows and signals determinism. In our empirical cases, we indeed find that China wanted more influence over infrastructure development projects in

Asia; Denmark, Germany, and Spain wanted renewable energy governance; and the member states of the EU wanted to have a security policy and field operations. For incumbent IOs, the only option left was to make the most of it, which involved adaptation. Again, the World Bank was much more proactive than the IEA, let alone the OSCE, but we have generally seen responses that point in the direction of adaptation including through setting new priorities, changing the mandate, and reaching out to new entrant institutions. The different types of existential challenges are therefore important to understand why institutional actors chose different types of responses.

At the same time, the evidence is clear that the type of existential challenge cannot explain the proactiveness and intensity with which IO institutional actors respond. We thus also need to consider the *institutional features of IO actors* (Proposition 2, see Chapter 2). In this book, we have put considerable emphasis on IO leadership. IO institutional actors need to be able to recognize existential challenges on time, formulate strategic responses, and implement those. In other words, when it comes to existential challenges, even more so than day-to-day policy-making, IO institutional actors need direction from the top. In addition, we have identified the organizational structure (of the institutional actors themselves), formal competences (within the IO), and embeddedness in external networks (outside the IO) as features potentially affecting the ability of institutional actors to respond.

How do these institutional features help us to explain the responses of IO institutional actors? Let us start with IO leadership, as across all six case studies this has been an important variable. The two IOs that scored high on leadership, the World Bank and NATO, had the most proactive responses. The two IOs that scored low, responded the least. While there exists an association between several of our institutional features and the responses by institutional actors (see Table 6.1 for an overview of the findings), the qualitative evidence of the case studies points time and again to the significance of leadership: World Bank President Kim and NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg steered their organizations through the existential challenges; UNFCCC Executive Secretary Figueres helped develop the external network and the newly appointed IEA Director-General Birol provided impetus for belated adaptation; WTO Director-General Azevêdo refrained while successive OSCE Secretaries-General insufficiently saw the challenge to their organization and did too little about it.

Part of the explanation of IO leadership rests with the authority of the position within its own organization and within the IO more generally (see further on organizational structure and formal competences below). Some positions, like the World Bank presidency, are simply stronger than others,

Table 6.1 Comparison of findings of the case studies[a]

Case study	Leadership	Structure	Competences	Network	Response
World Bank	High	Hierarchical	High	Medium/ High	Proactive
NATO	High	Hierarchical	Medium	High	Proactive
UNFCCC	Medium	Secretariat	Low	High	Indirect
IEA	Medium	Secretariat	Medium	Low	Belated
WTO	Low	Decentralized	Low	Low	None
OSCE	Low	Decentralized	Low	Low	None

[a]The scores summarize the findings outlined in Tables 3.1, 4.1, and 5.1 and are based on our own coding of institutional features and responses of the six case studies. Formal competences need explanation. According to most existing datasets, NATO scores low on the related concept of 'authority' and the WTO high (because it has an adjudication body). Yet not all formal competences of institutional actors are directly relevant when responding to the existential challenges (see also Chapter 2). For instance, while the NATO Secretary-General has agenda-setting powers and chairs the North Atlantic Council, the UNFCCC, WTO, IEA, and OSCE all have separate elected chairs.

like the OSCE Secretary-General, and this is by design. The appointment of IO leaders by the member states with screening and selection also plays a critical role. Some IO leaders are appointed because member states desire strong leadership, while others precisely because member states do not want strong leadership. NATO gets a former head of government as the Secretary-General, while other IOs may have to do with former foreign ministers or diplomats. At the same time, the case studies do highlight also the personal experience, skill, and character of IO leaders (see Chapter 2). This is particularly obvious when comparing them to their predecessors and successors in the same institution. Stoltenberg at NATO was the right man for the job to establish rapport with Trump, and much more modest than his predecessor. Azevêdo differed significantly from his predecessor Lamy, just as Birol was much more proactive than Van der Hoeven, and Figueres more outspoken than Espinosa. The case studies thus show that the position and also the personality and experience mattered in the moment. It appears that leaders with administrative experience in running large governmental departments (notably multilateral bureaucracies) and with experience engaging in public did better than career diplomats and former ministers.

Of the three other institutional features, we found that embeddedness in external networks was a surprising source of support for IO institutional actors. While IOs have too long been considered closed shops (but see Tallberg et al. 2013), we found in the two case studies of the UNFCCC and NATO that external networks mattered a great deal. Even if the external networks

of both IOs were fairly different—the former made up of civil society actors and the latter of governmental actors in the transatlantic security and defence establishment—around both IOs there is a strong community supporting the rationale of these organizations. IO institutional actors in the UNFCCC and NATO are at the heart of these networks, as important nodes that facilitate these networks and communities.

What is more, in other case studies (notably the WTO and OSCE) we have seen the absence of embeddedness in similar networks. Indeed, this has provided a strong contrast. While there was hope in the WTO for the troubles to end with the Trump presidency, the lack of like-minded actors in the United States and the inability to reestablish a narrative of free trade have been detrimental to the WTO. The OSCE, on the other hand, lacks visibility and too few participating states seriously support the organization. Interestingly, various institutional actors have also themselves seen external networks as a way to increase support. The UNFCCC is the obvious case, but also the OSCE has set up a network of think tanks and universities. Public diplomacy and outreach have become a very prominent part of NATO's activities (a traditionally closed IO). Similarly, the IEA has tried to establish networks with other IOs to strengthen its position when it comes to expertise on energy and climate change.

Across the case studies, we also found organizational structure to be a factor inhibiting strategic responses. This was mostly the case in the WTO, where the Appellate Body is put at arm's length of the political structures including the WTO Secretariat proper. This makes it difficult for IO institutional actors to respond. A similar thing can be said about the OSCE, which has a relatively light secretariat in Vienna, whereas the three institutions and the various field operations have considerable autonomy from headquarters (by design). Once again, this contrasts with some of the more responsive IOs, where there are clearly lines of authority and corporate cultures in support of the mandate and mission of the organization.

Formal competences are the institutional feature for which we found least support. Based on the datasets, we would expect most purposeful responses from the WTO (because it scores the highest on authority) and NATO to be purely a member-driven IO (as it scores the lowest on authority). This is clearly not the case. When zooming in a bit more, however, we do see that in some IOs formal competences seem to work like a background condition that affects appropriate behaviour. IO leaders in the WTO, UNFCCC, and OSCE perhaps took more modest positions than the World Bank President. At the same time, formal competences may provide opportunities. As the NATO Secretary-General chairs the meetings of the North Atlantic Council,

Stoltenberg had an agenda-setting role, which was the discretion he needed to become more proactive. More generally, however, we found that when it comes to existential challenges with IOs at stake, informal forms of governance and behaviour may overtake formalized rules (e.g. Kreuder-Sonnen, 2019; Schuette, 2024; Stone, 2011). Those exceptional episodes may justify exceptional behaviour where IO institutional actors can afford to act outside the established formal rules. Personality and networks may then matter more.

Table 6.1 provides an overview of all institutional features as well as the response of IO actors to existential challenges. While at first sight there seems to be some multicollinearity between the institutional features, this is also exactly what we proposed in our theoretical chapter. These four institutional features are not mutually exclusive but rather reinforce each other. From the rich case study findings, however, it does become clear that leadership is the key variable. In all, these comparative findings provide strong support for Proposition 2 that the ability of institutional actors to respond depends on their institutional features, just as variation in the chosen responses (adaptation versus resistance) in the six case studies provides support for Proposition 1.

6.3 Implications for research on international organizations

Institutional actors respond very differently when existential challenges hit their IOs. The six case studies reveal that institutional actors can be proactive strategists that tailor responses to the different types of existential challenges, but also that their response significantly depends on their institutional abilities to use their resources. These findings undermine some of the more established pearls of wisdom about IOs that are rife throughout the scholarship. First, the fate of IOs is not simply a function of domestic and/or systemic politics (where existential challenges may originate) but also depends on their own agency and their ability to cope with and counter existential challenges. Second, contrary to popular belief, IOs and their institutional actors are not by default slow-moving, sticky, and path-dependent organizations, gridlocked by veto-players and bureaucratic inertia. They can be surprisingly proactive in addressing existential challenges that affect their organizations.

There is no need here to revisit some of the previous claims in the literature about the secondary nature of IOs and/or their institutional pathologies (see Chapter 1.2 on literature review from Mearsheimer to Barnett and

Finnemore). Rather, we like to make four points about what we see as important avenues of research and how our book drives research forward. First, we would like to see more IO level of analysis and research on the current crisis of liberal and rules-based global order. Second, it is important to better understand the distinct processes in IOs when they have to deal with crises, emergencies, or survival. Third, the behaviour of IO institutional actors as sticky or proactive actors deserves further research. Finally, we still need to better understand how IOs survive and persist and how governance change comes about throughout their lifecycles.

In terms of our contribution to the literature, it is firstly evident that there is a need to pay much more attention to what we call the *IO level of analysis*. The overwhelming majority of research that engages with the 'crises of IOs' is nested in the field of domestic politics—including the research on populism, Euroscepticism, and IO legitimacy—and by extension studies domestic actors. Also, much of the IR literature continues to occupy itself with more abstract notions of the 'liberal international order', 'rise of the rest', or 'norm contestation' with a lack of any careful understanding of some of the key institutions (as in IOs) that sustain broader norms, orders, and regimes. In those rare publications, where scholars do zoom in on IOs they also find overwhelming evidence that institutional actors of IOs are significant in crises and for the development and survival of IOs (see, e.g. case studies De Sa e Silva, 2021; Heldt et al., 2022; Hirschmann, 2021).

An IO level of analysis is not simply about adding several institutional variables to the existing models but also asking different research questions and thinking through the conceptual and theoretical logic. For instance, the research question 'why do states withdraw from IOs?' (e.g. Von Borzyskowski & Vabulas, 2019) needs to be complemented with the question 'why do some IOs experience more state withdrawals than others?' (e.g. Dijkstra & Ghassim, 2024) as well as questions about the impact on actual IOs afterwards in terms of reforms and termination (e.g. Von Borzyskowski & Vabulas, 2023, 2024). A state-level analysis is, for instance, often biased towards a handful of countries, such as the United States, which most regularly withdraws from IOs. Some new quantitative research does take the IO level of analysis more seriously (e.g. Debre & Dijkstra, 2021a; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2020; Gray, 2018; Haftel & Nadel, 2024; Lenz & Söderbaum, 2023; Reinsberg, 2025; Sommerer et al., 2022a), but we need more fine-grained analyses particularly in terms of better and more specific variables and data. Current studies tend to include variables of authority and institutionalization, or staff size at best, but these are incomplete proxies for IO responses, as this book has clearly shown.

The findings of our book also underline a need to pay closer attention to *crisis policy-making in IOs*. While the research agenda on international public administration (e.g. Bauer et al., 2016; Trondal et al., 2013) has considerably advanced our understanding of policy-making in IOs during normal times, the case studies highlight that the processes in IOs differ when it concerns existential challenges. We found that formal authority enshrined in treaties matters less than expected and that the preferences and interests of IO international actors were rather focused and clear-cut. This casts doubt on the extent to which variables such as 'autonomy of will' and 'autonomy of action' actually drive policy-making in crises. In this respect, the book fits in with a range of recent studies about 'emergency governance' (Kreuder-Sonnen, 2019) or 'survival politics' (Schuette, 2024). There is simply something distinct about how institutional actors behave when they are faced with existential challenges that put their own organization at risk. This point is particularly important when considering, once again, that most data-gathering efforts are geared towards coding formal powers of IOs.

Scholars have, of course, addressed informal governance in IOs in exceptional circumstances (Stone, 2011) and the scholarly literature on the EU has engaged extensively with its 'polycrisis' (e.g. Bauer & Becker, 2014; Cross, 2017; Riddervold, Trondal, Newsome, 2021; Zeitlin et al., 2019). At the same time, public administration scholarship provides important concepts on crisis governance (e.g. Boin et al., 2016, 2020). Nonetheless, in the broader scholarship on IOs, the idea of crisis governance and policy-making remains insufficiently integrated. How IOs identify and frame crises, which actors take the lead, the formal versus informal processes are all points that the cases in this book have highlighted as relevant. They require us to study better what goes on within the 'black box' of IO policy-making during crises rather than assuming that the regular formal rules hold, or worse, that IOs simply remain member state forums.

Another point that runs throughout this book is the *proactiveness of institutional actors in IOs* when dealing with existential challenges. This contrasts with the more general understanding in the literature of sticky and slow-moving IO bureaucracies. While the proactiveness may be partly explained by the nature of existential challenges (bureaucrats suddenly moving quickly if their jobs are on the line), this has clearly not been the case across all six case studies. In other words, just as with the condition of crises and crisis governance, there is a need for more nuance in understanding the behaviour of institutional actors. This may include both the micro-level processes, which help to explain what makes individual officials in IOs proactive or inert, but

also the broader bureaucratic cultures that run through IOs (e.g. Bayerlein et al., 2020). There is also a need for evaluative benchmarks in this regard. For instance, the response of proactive behavioural resistance by institutional actors trying to safeguard core IO rationales and defend the status quo might be easily interpreted as stickiness or even an institutional pathology. The book therefore shows that we need to be more careful in our understanding of institutional actors.

Finally, the book contributes to the broader research agenda on the *lifecycle of IOs*. While our scholarly knowledge on the design and development of IOs is considerable, we know much less about IO decline and death (Gray, 2024). Quantitative studies on IO vitality and death have, in this regard, highlighted the importance of IO institutional actors (Debre & Dijkstra, 2021a; Gray, 2018; but also Dijkstra & Debre, 2022; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2021). The drawback of such studies is, however, that they take fairly crude measures of institutional actors, such as simply the number of officials working in IOs (Debre & Dijkstra, 2021a; but see Dijkstra & Debre, 2022; Dijkstra, Debre, & Heinkelmann-Wild, 2024). The case studies in this book are more refined with different institutional features and more in-depth analysis. They support the overall findings that institutional actors, under conditions, are significantly important for how IOs respond to existential challenges and thereby potentially survive them. Like some of the cross-sectional analyses, this book highlights the considerable survival of IOs. While this is important in terms of understanding the lifecycle of IOs and particularly institutional change, there are still open questions about the precise pathways from existential challenges to decline and ultimately IO termination (Mumby, 2023; Von Borzyskowski & Vabulas, 2024).

In more general terms, this book also shows that the lifecycle of IOs tends to be less linear than often assumed. While the League of Nations is traditionally portrayed as following an ideal-type lifecycle with successive life stages ('the years of growth', 'stability', 'conflict', and 'defeat' in Walters, 1952; 'the rise' and 'the fall' in Scott, 1973), Julia Gray (2024, pp. 643–644) rightly notes that 'IOs can experience several potential life stages, although not all of the stages are sequential, and not all IOs experience all of them … [as] IOs can ebb and flow through many different states in the course of their existence'. This is in line with what we know about institutional change with scholars pointing at gradual transformation and punctuated equilibrium theory (see particularly Figure 2 on IO lifecycles in Debre & Dijkstra, 2023). In our case studies we came to similar findings. Indeed, our case study research was often about shooting at moving targets, as we were unclear, for instance, whether the Biden administration would again appoint judges to the WTO

Appellate Body (no), whether the OSCE would pass next year's budget (no), and whether NATO will survive a second term of Donald Trump (unclear, see *Foreign Affairs, 2024*). To put it differently, the life stage that an IO currently appears to be in does not determine necessarily the next life stage. We thus need further research on IO lifecycles and how/why IOs move from one stage to the next.

6.4 The survival of international organizations

This book is entitled *The Survival of International Organizations* and it has dealt with existential challenges to IOs during the last 10–15 years. For the six IOs studied in this book, the relevant existential challenges have only manifested since the early 2010s (or even later). We are aware, of course, that there have been previous episodes during which IOs were existentially challenged (for instance, League of Nations; New International Economic Order), yet it is fair to say that the last 10–15 years have put many post-war and post-Cold War IOs seriously to the test. When we look at the outcomes of these existential challenges across the six case studies, however, the OSCE is the only IO at risk of termination while the WTO has declined in importance. This clearly speaks to the optimistic tone of the book. Existential crises are not deterministic and, while one can debate the current state of IOs, the glass is certainly not entirely empty (e.g. Debre & Dijkstra, 2023; Sommerer et al. 2022a). Many IOs have survived this period of contestation, yet it raises the obvious question: what about the next 10–15 years?

Predictions in international relations are difficult, particularly when it concerns the long term. By the end of the 21st century, well over 80% of the world's population is predicted to live in Asia and Africa. Nigeria alone may have more inhabitants than all the countries of the current EU taken together. It is clear that the IOs, as we currently know them, are not ready for such a long-term shift. The current set of IOs will not have the legitimacy and 'right to rule' when the population for a large majority lives in countries that are currently underrepresented. Many IOs, which rely for their funding—assessed and voluntary—still largely on Western member states, will not be able to effectively implement policies in such a world. All of this is hardly surprising. In the long term, different forms of governance tend to come and go, even if their legacies are often reflected in new forms of governance. The Italian city-states, once powerful actors (at least in Europe), are no longer in existence either.

Yet, for the moment, we need not concern us much with global governance at the end of the century. Quite apart from Keynesian wisdom concerning the 'long term', IOs tend to govern in the medium term. Only half of IOs have a chance to last fifty years before they are terminated or replaced (see Kaplan-Meier estimates of overall survival time in Debre & Dijkstra, 2021a, Figure 2). Global governance and IO survival in the medium term will thus be critical. The current set of IOs will likely continue to be at the heart of international cooperation in the decades to come, thus involved in critical policy problems such as climate action and digital regulation, as well as potentially mitigating the effects of important power transitions. The survival of IOs, including through proactive strategies of adaptation, will therefore be important in the next fifteen years. Policy-makers, particularly those in the West, should pay considerable attention to the continued challenges that IOs will likely have to face.

The optimistic tone of the book is not just a reflection of the outcomes of the six IO case studies but also the main policy takeaway message: This book shows that IOs can remain relevant, be effective, and survive if they are given sufficient chance. The finding that institutional features are significant in explaining why some IO institutional actors respond more proactively to direct and indirect existential challenges implies that we can actually design better IOs with stronger institutional features to make them more robust. We can also institutionally strengthen existing IOs by building up their resources. The obvious way is to provide IOs with more autonomy and insulate them better from undue membership influences, provide them with unearmarked funding and staff resources, but also—as this book has shown—invest in their leadership, the embeddedness in external networks (including domestic networks across the membership), and to give IO leaders sufficient control over their organizational structures.

Some policy changes can be remarkably simple. For instance, IOs can open their appointment procedures for leaders by holding public hearings. As one example, the proactive Danish President of the General Assembly organized public hearings in 2016 to appoint the next UN Secretary-General. While it was unofficially the turn of the Eastern European Group to deliver the Secretary-General (as it was the only UN group which never had one), various nominees of Eastern Europe turned up ill-prepared for those hearings and disappointed the member states. For instance, one diplomat commented on Bulgaria's front-runner nominee and UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova, 'I thought she could be a lead contender but less so after those two hours' (as cited in Borger, 2016). Eventually, António Guterres from Portugal became the new UN Secretary-General. He has been an underdog

(as Western Europe and Others Group had already had three Secretaries-General before). Yet with ten years of experience in the UN system as the High Commissioner for Refugees, he performed well publicly. His appointment became, of course, ultimately part of the UN Security Council closed-door horse-trading, but it is fair to say that a more public screening of future IO leaders can help to avoid accidents.

Importantly, strengthening the institutional features of current IOs can be counterintuitive for Western states as the main protagonists of the current order. As the emerging powers get wealthier, there are understandable calls for them to pay more into the system. Yet if Western states want to strengthen the robustness of IOs by beefing up their institutional features, they too need to pay more. Also, there needs to be a shift from voluntary contributions and earmarked funding back to assessed contributions and free-to-spend IO budgets. This also goes against the mindset of many Western donors who have insisted on the effective use of their taxpayers' money and accountability mechanisms. Many of such control mechanisms, mostly created by Western states to keep control over IOs as the main principals, start to undermine the actual effectiveness of IOs in pursuing liberal, expertise-informed, and rules-based policies in a world in transition. In other words, for states to strengthen the institutional features of IOs involves dilemmas.

As we move deeper into the 21st century, it is also clear that the founders and protagonists of the liberal international order, with IOs as cornerstone institutions, still have the leverage and power to institutionalize order according to their preferences. But this is getting much harder. There is still time to make IOs more robust—in order to address the challenges of climate change or new technologies—but time is also running out. We have already seen that the EU alone, while able to defend multilateral institutions during the Trump years, has found it more difficult to transform and expand multilateralism (Schuette & Dijkstra, 2023b). This also points to the need for a coalition of like-minded states to close their ranks in support of multilateral institutions and IOs.

Whatever the future brings, it has become obvious that we need to continue to study the survival of IOs. This book has only taken the first step in systematically adopting an IO level analysis trying to explain the varying responses of institutional actors to existential challenges. With the results from its six case studies, we have provided part of the puzzle about the longevity and the survival of IOs. IOs as institutions do not simply

survive because they are 'sticky'. Rather, we have noted the proactive strategies of IO institutional actors, the ones to have most to lose in case of organizational decline or termination. Including them and their specific institutional features into our future analyses of IO lifecycles are essential, not just for our understanding of IOs in fundamental academic terms but also for how we can continue to design and improve our system of global governance.

List of interviews

Interview A1   Researcher/Expert, 20/03/2020

Interview A2   EU official, 24/03/2020

Interview A3   Former WTO official, 25/03/2020

Interview A4   WTO official, 01/04/2020

Interview A5   Former WTO Appellate Body official, 02/04/2020

Interview A6   EU official, 03/04/2020

Interview A7   IO official, 06/04/2020

Interview A8   Former WTO Appellate Body official, 07/04/2020

Interview A9   IO official, 08/04/2020

Interview A10   WTO official, 04/06/2020

Interview A11   EU official, 05/06/2020 and 18/02/2021

Interview A12   Researcher/Expert, 09/06/2020 and 23/02/2021

Interview A13   Former WTO official, 16/06/2020 and 17/02/2021

Interview A14   Former WTO Appellate Body official, 22/06/2020

Interview A15   Former WTO official, 23/06/2020

Interview A16   Former WTO official, 29/06/2020 and 24/02/2021

Interview A17   Former WTO official, 16/02/2021

Interview A18   Former IO official, 26/02/2021

Interview A19   World Bank official, 05/03/2021

Interview A20   World Bank official, 10/03/2021

Interview A21   World Bank official, 15/03/2021

Interview A22   World Bank official, 19/03/2021

Interview A23   World Bank official, 22/03/2021

Interview A24   World Bank official, 23/03/2021

Interview A25   World Bank official, 24/03/2021

Interview A26   World Bank official, 25/03/2021

Interview A27   World Bank official, 25/03/2021

Interview A28   World Bank official, 29/03/2021

Interview A29   World Bank official, 06/04/2021

Interview A30   World Bank official, 07/04/2021

Interview A31   World Bank official, 08/04/2021

Interview A32   Researcher/Expert, 21/10/2021

Interview A33   Researcher/Expert, 08/11/2021

Interview A34   AIIB official, 16/11/2021

Interview A35   Researcher/Expert, 24/11/2021

Interview A36   AIIB official, 26/11/2021

Interview A37   Former AIIB official, 02/12/2021

Interview A38   Researcher/Expert, 06/12/2021

Interview A39   IO official, 08/12/2021

Interview A40   World Bank official, 18/03/2022

Interview A41   World Bank official, 04/04/2022

Interview A42   IO official, 06/04/2022

Interview B1   Former UNFCCC staff, 30/03/2020

Interview B2   UNFCCC staff, 31/03/2020

Interview B3   UNFCCC staff, 03/04/2020 and 09/04/2020

Interview B4   UNFCCC staff, 07/04/2020

Interview B5   UNFCCC staff, 09/04/2020

Interview B6   Negotiator Global North, 12/05/2020

Interview B7   Negotiator and adviser Global South, 04/06/2020

Interview B8   Non-state actor/COP participator Global South, 07/07/2020

Interview B9   Green Climate Fund staff, 20/08/2020

Interview B10   Former UNFCCC staff, 25/08/2020

Interview B11   Former UNFCCC staff, 28/09/2020

Interview B12   UNFCCC adviser Global South, 08/10/2020

Interview B13   Negotiator Global North, 21/10/2020

Interview B14   Negotiator Global North, 21/10/2020

Interview B15   Negotiator Global North, 29/10/2020

Interview B16   Negotiator Global North, 30/10/2020

Interview B17   UNFCCC adviser Global South, 15/02/2021

Interview B18   Negotiator Global North, 18/02/2021

Interview B19   Negotiator Global North, 18/02/2021

Interview B20   Former negotiator Global North, 24/02/2021

Interview B21   Negotiator Global North, 04/03/2021

Interview B22   Negotiator Global North, 04/03/2021

Interview B23   Negotiator Global South, 04/03/2021

Interview B24   Negotiator Global North, 09/03/2021

Interview B25   Negotiator Global North, 25/03/2021

Interview B26   Negotiator Global South, 20/04/2021

Interview B27   National oil association, 19/04/2021

Interview B28   UNFCCC negotiator IEA relations, 21/04/2021

Interview B29   National IEA member state representative, 11/05/2021

Interview B30   National IEA member state representative/group interview, 17/05/2021

Interview B31   National IEA member state representative/group interview, 17/05/2021

Interview B32   National IEA member state representative/group interview, 17/05/2021

Interview B33   National IEA member state representative, 27/05/2021

Interview B34   National IEA member state representative, 02/07/2019

Interview B35   IEA staff, 21/09/2021

Interview B36   IEA staff, 13/10/2021

Interview B37   IRENA staff, 03/11/2021

Interview B38   IRENA staff, 11/11/2021

Interview B39   Former IRENA staff, 02/12/2021

Interview B40   IRENA staff/group interview, 01/02/2022

Interview B41   IRENA staff/group interview, 01/02/2022

Interview B42   IRENA staff/group interview, 01/02/2022

Interview B43   IRENA staff/follow up, 13/06/2022

Interview C1   NATO official, 28/05/2020

Interview C2   NATO official, 04/06/2020

Interview C3   National official, 04/06/2020

Interview C4   NATO official, 04/06/2020

Interview C5   National official, 04/06/2020

Interview C6   National official, 05/06/2020

Interview C7   Former NATO official, 08/06/2020

Interview C8   NATO official, 09/06/2020

Interview C9   Former NATO official, 15/06/2020

Interview C10   NATO official, 18/06/2020

Interview C11   NATO official, 23/06/2020

Interview C12   National official, 09/07/2020

Interview C13   National official, 23/07/2020

Interview C14   Former national official, 26/10/2020

Interview C15   National official, 11/01/2021

Interview C16   National official, 08/02/2021

Interview C17   Former national official, 09/03/2021

Interview C18   National official, 12/03/2021

Interview C19   National official, 29/06/2021

Interview C20   Former OSCE official, 22/07/2021

Interview C21   Former OSCE official, 31/08/2021

Interview C22   Former OSCE official, 01/09/2021

Interview C23   Former national official, 06/09/2021

Interview C24   National official, 06/09/2021

Interview C25   OSCE official, 07/09/2021

Interview C26   OSCE official, 08/09/2021

Interview C27   OSCE official, 08/09/2021

Interview C28   Former OSCE official, 09/09/2021

Interview C29   Former OSCE official, 17/09/2021

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