

**Transparency and Access to Records at  
Intergovernmental Organizations: IAEA and NATO**

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The  
University of Manitoba in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Joint Master's Program Department of History (Archival Studies)  
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## **List of Abbreviations**

ARMS	Archives and Records Management Section (IAEA)
CTS	Cosmic Top Secret (NATO)
HBC	Hudson's Bay Company
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NC	NATO Classified
NR	NATO Restricted
NS	NATO Secret
NU	NATO Unclassified
NAC	North Atlantic Council (NATO)
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PDN	Public Disclosure Notice (NATO)
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (NATO)
UN	United Nations

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## Acknowledgements

First, I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Greg Bak, for his patience and tireless support in providing invaluable feedback. The genesis of this thesis is in no small part indebted to an email Dr. Bak sent informing me of an internship opportunity at the IAEA, as well as his suggestion that I focus on the issue of access. The extent of his support cannot be overstated; from arranging Skype meetings while I lived overseas, to reviewing drafts under tight deadlines as I prepared to return to Belgium, my gratitude is immense. Thank you! Special thanks must also be given to Dr. Tom Nesmith for his wonderful lectures and stimulating email correspondence that has shaped my perspectives on archival theory.

Second, thank you to my examination committee and reviewers, Dr. Andrea Charron, Dr. Jennifer Dueck, and Dr. Barry Ferguson, for agreeing to the defence under a compressed timeline and for their written comments and observations.

Third, I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisors at both the IAEA and NATO Archives, Gabriella Ivacs and Dr. Ineke Deserno, respectively. Our conversations over the many months I worked under their guidance informed my perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of archival management in an intergovernmental environment. I would be remiss not to acknowledge more generally the opportunity I was given by both my supervisors to participate in various projects, meetings, seminars, and conferences. Finally, I was deeply touched by their hospitality and generosity. For this, I am deeply indebted.

Fourth, I want to thank my colleagues at both the IAEA and NATO for the kindness they showed me while I was a guest in their workplace, and for the guidance and mentoring they provided. The list of people to mention is simply too extensive; however, I would like single out thank Nick Nguyen at the NATO Archives (at the risk of offending my other coworkers), as our conversations significantly shaped my perspective on public disclosure and archival outreach. For this, I am grateful.

Fifth, thank you to my fellow interns, Giulia Sacco, Riccarda Leoni, Liah Kubwalo, and Francesca Magnoni, for their friendship and support throughout this journey. My time in Vienna and Brussels would not have been as enjoyable or intellectually stimulating without them.

Finally, I wish to thank my parents for their constant support, especially during my prolonged absence from Canada, and their gentle reminders to write more and often!

## **Disclaimer**

To fulfill one of the requirements of my program, I was an intern at the IAEA Archives from May 2018 to February 2019, and at the NATO Archives from March 2019 to August 2019. As a condition of my internship programs, I was required to sign confidentiality agreements that forbade me from discussing knowledge or information that I may have become privy to during the duration of my tenure there.



## Abstract

Archives of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have not been the subject of systematic inquiry in the archival literature despite the central role IGOs have played in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century international relations and governance. It is therefore essential that the records of these institutions, as well as the institutional archives that facilitate access to them, are properly understood. Historically though, access to records of IGOs, especially those concerned with national security information, such as the IAEA and NATO, has been a privilege afforded only to internal staff and not to external researchers.

This thesis aims to address this gap, in part, by examining the challenges that archives in IGOs face in providing access to their corporate records, balancing the need to safeguard sensitive information with the responsibility to be transparent in their operations by providing access to their institutional archives. I argue that the *Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information*, otherwise known as the Tshwane Principles, provide a useful framework for analyzing this balancing act in IGOs. I examine these challenges through case studies of two IGO archives: International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

## Introduction

Archives of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have not been the subject of systematic inquiry in the archival literature. Lacking the sovereignty of states, they are still public bodies that have influenced international relations and governance in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The history of 20<sup>th</sup> century international governance and relations cannot be understood without studying the institutions that facilitate negotiations between member states. Nor can their effects of grand diplomacy on the citizen body that constitute the nation state be scrutinized without access to the corporate records of these institutions. It is therefore essential that the records of these institutions, as well as the archives that facilitate access to them, are properly understood. Historically though, access to records of IGOs, especially those concerned with national security information, such as the IAEA and NATO, has been a privilege afforded only to internal staff and not to external researchers.

This thesis aims to address this gap, in part, by examining the challenges that archives in IGOs face in providing access to their corporate records, balancing the need to safeguard sensitive information with the responsibility to be transparent in their operations by providing access to their institutional archives. I argue that the *Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information*, otherwise known as the Tshwane Principles, provide a useful framework for analyzing this balancing act in IGOs. I examine these challenges through case studies of two IGO archives: International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The IAEA and NATO provide interesting examples of the limitations and opportunities of providing access to sensitive records around national security. They were selected in part because of my personal experience with both institutions, but also for their similarities and differences. Both IGOs are responsible for sensitive national security information of member states; the IAEA of records regarding national nuclear programmes,

and NATO of military operations and security intelligence. Each was founded in the context of the early Cold War. Significantly, both have been criticized for their lack of transparency, specifically in terms of access to information and records. While most of this criticism focuses on the lack of disclosure of contemporary documents, this study focuses on access to records held in archival institutions at each respective organization.

Chapter 1 makes the case for greater transparency in IGOs rooted in access to corporate records in institutional archives. It analyzes the distinct character of IGOs and the structural limitations these impose on corporate archives. Next, it considers the role of the corporate archivist in an IGO, specifically the challenge of balancing institutional loyalties with the need to advocate for external user access to enhance accountability. I argue that transparency is more than simply financial accountability; rather, it encompasses the ability to hold intergovernmental organizations accountable for their decision-making processes, the internal and external services they provide to member states and the public and, in the case of NATO, military operations. Transparency, therefore, is twofold: democratic and institutional. Clearer and publically available policies around access to institutional records, as well as a commitment on the part of IGOs to proactive and systematic public disclosure is an essential component of both these facets of transparency. In particular, I argue that IGOs would benefit from framing their declassification and public disclosure programs around the *Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information*, otherwise known as the Tshwane Principles. This discussion provides the general framework for the subsequent case studies of the IAEA and NATO.

Chapter 2 situates the IAEA Archives in its institutional context before turning to the policy framework governing internal and external access. The lack of an explicit democratic mandate, absence of an independent governance structure, and an unwillingness on the part of the leadership of the Agency to broaden their conception of institutional access outside of

financial accountability, have hampered the IAEA Archives' efforts to adopt proactive public disclosure and declassification procedures. Section 1 provides an overview of the IAEA's origins, mandate and structure to examine the institutional constraints the IAEA Archives operates within. Section 2 provides an overview of the IAEA's access policy framework, with priority given to internal policies given that these are the most developed. Section 3 examines the limitations of the IAEA's external access policies and gives consideration of the many criticisms raised in academic circles. Finally, Section 4 considers the IAEA's compliance with the Tshwane Principles in relation to these criticisms, and offers specific recommendations on how the Agency can improve its access framework and make its archival processes more transparent, specifically its declassification and public disclosure procedures.

Chapter 3 focuses primarily on NATO's public disclosure program. It examines why the NATO Archives, in contrast to the IAEA Archives, has been able to implement proactive systematic and ad-hoc declassification and public disclosure policies. Section 1 details the institutional context of the NATO Archives, including the governance structure and consensus-based model of decision making within the alliance. Attention is given to the Archives Committee and the silence procedure, both of which are essential to the success of the Alliance's declassification and public disclosure program. Section 2 provides a brief history of NATO's approach and philosophy to disclosure and declassification, culminating in the establishment of the NATO Archives in 1999, 50 years after the founding of the alliance. Section 3 analyses NATO's policies regarding access to information, focusing on the policies and directives on public disclosure and declassification. Section 4 considers NATO's non-policy strategies to enhance access of its archival collections including its archival exhibition program and online document portal, NATO Archives Online. Section 5 examines NATO's overall compliance with the Tshwane Principles.

## Chapter 1

### **Intergovernmental Organizations: The Case for Greater Transparency through Access to Archival Records**

At one extreme, nothing is hidden. All government files are open to inspection by anyone wanting to see them, and meetings are always public. At the other, secrecy reigns supreme.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Introduction**

Tom Nesmith observes that “Archives have never been as widely used and valuable as they have become in the past 50 years.”<sup>2</sup> While this statement rings true for the archives of nation states, the records of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have been under-utilized and have received scant attention by archival scholars. Given the proliferation of IGOs after the Second World War, the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century international governance and relations cannot be understood without studying the institutions that facilitate negotiations between member states. IGOs, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), fulfil such a function. Nor can their effects of grand diplomacy on the citizen body that constitute the nation state be scrutinized without access to the corporate records of these institutions.

The records of IGOs seem well placed to service the growing demand for archival knowledge given their inherently transnational character. For intergovernmental organizations to fully contribute to the development of what Nesmith terms the “archival stage of knowledge”, access to their corporate records is an inherent prerequisite.<sup>3</sup>

Historically though, access to records of IGOs, especially those concerned with national

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<sup>1</sup> A. Florini, “Increasing Transparency in Government,” *International Journal on World Peace* 19, no 3 (2002): 4.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Nesmith, “Toward the Archival Stage in the History of Knowledge,” *Archivaria* 80 (Fall 2015): 145.

<sup>3</sup> Nesmith, “Toward the Archival Stage in the History of Knowledge,” 119.

security information, such as the IAEA and NATO, has been a privilege afforded only to internal staff and not to external researchers.

### 1. Archives in Intergovernmental Organizations

An intergovernmental organization (IGO) refers to an institution created by several sovereign states with regional or international responsibilities of common interest to its members, but acts to a degree independently of its member states through the authority of a treaty or founding legal instrument.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, they must possess “sufficient organizational structure and autonomy to provide formal, ongoing, multilateral processes of decision-making between states, along with the capacity to execute the collective will of their members (states).”<sup>5</sup> The IAEA falls under the specific category of the IGO, defining itself as an “independent intergovernmental, science and technology-based organization, in the United Nations family, that serves as the global focal point for nuclear cooperation.”<sup>6</sup> NATO, as the formal institution that coordinates the day-to-day logistics of managing a trans-national alliance of 29 member states, also falls under this institutional category.

IGOs form one of the pillars of the global political order. However, their function and effectiveness within international relations is fiercely debated. Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom provides a succinct analysis of the fault-lines in the existing literature on IGOs, noting that:

Constructivist, functionalist and liberal institutionalists contend that IGOs are (or can be) a central component of world order. On the other side, many

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<sup>4</sup> Union of International Associations, “What is an intergovernmental organization (IGO)?”, Accessed 7 January 2020. <https://uia.org/faq/yb3>; Harvard Law School, “Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs)”, Accessed 15 November 2019. <https://hls.harvard.edu/dept/opia/what-is-public-interest-law/public-service-practice-settings/public-international-law/intergovernmental-organizations-igos/>

<sup>5</sup> Thomas J. Volgy, Elizabeth Fausett, Keith A. Grant and Stuart Rodgers, “Identifying Formal Intergovernmental Organizations,” *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 6 (Nov. 2008): 851.

<sup>6</sup> Armelle Le Goff, *The Records of NGOs: Memory...To Be Shared, a Practical Guide in 60 Questions*. (Paris: International Council on Archives, 2004): 3; International Atomic Energy Agency, “The IAEA Mission Statement,” Accessed April 5, 2018. <https://www.iaea.org/about/mission>

realists argue that IGOs are only marginally influential in world politics and that IGOs typically reflect status quo power relations.<sup>7</sup>

It is not necessary for the purposes of this study to delve deeply into the philosophical debates concerning the origins, functions, and relationship of IGOs to member states that dominate the literature on this subject. Rather, it is useful to consider certain aspects of IGOs that impact most directly on the legal and structural positions of their corporate archives.

First, IGOs are not sovereign states. Instead, they are constituted by, and represent the interests of, those nation states that voluntarily choose to delegate a limited degree of their sovereignty in an international forum to deal with a limited mandate (ex. the IAEA is mandated to oversee the peaceful use of atomic energy).

Second, the property of IGOs are inviolable. Section 6 of the *Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies* states that the “archives of the specialized agencies, and in general all documents belonging to them or held by them, shall be inviolable, wherever located.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Section 3 of the *Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations* declares that the property of international organizations shall be “exempted from any search, requisition, confiscation, expropriation and any other form of interference, whether by executive, administrative, judicial or legislative action.”<sup>9</sup> This privilege exists to preserve the independence of IGOs against undue pressure from one or more member states. For example, IGOs are in theory empowered through the inviolable status of their property (including the records in their archives) to effectively resist subpoenas in civil or criminal proceedings to produce documents.<sup>10</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that IGOs should treat their records as purely private corporate resources. The archives

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Boehmer, Erik Gartzke, and Timothy Nordstrom, “Do Intergovernmental Organizations Promote Peace?”, *World Politics* 57 (2004): 3.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies*, New York: United Nations, November 21, 1947.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations*, New York: United Nations, February 13, 1946.

<sup>10</sup> Richard J. Oparil, “Immunity of International Organizations in United States Courts: Absolute or Restrictive?”, *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 24 (1991): 691.

of IGOs are required to comply with relevant legislation and standards in areas such as the protection of personal information, and to adopt internal policies that comply with the spirit of other national or international agreements.<sup>11</sup>

Third, intergovernmental organizations are public corporate entities. The archivist employed at an IGO thus assumes the role of a corporate archivist. As such, their primary responsibility is to preserve the institutional memory of the organization for the purposes of the organization. Since many of these institutions are not widely known (such as the IAEA), the extent that these archives service the public can be limited. Even organizations, such as NATO, that have a larger public profile because of their mandate and evolving role in international relations, are not well visited by external persons (aside, perhaps, from select experts in relevant fields). It is, therefore, not surprising that the primary users of institutional archives are current staff of the organization, and most access and security policies are structured around this reality. The Open Archival Information System (OAIS)<sup>12</sup> provides a model for distinguishing internal and external users through the concept of the designated community. A designated community is defined as:

An identified group of potential Consumers who should be able to understand a set of information. The Designated Community may be composed of multiple user communities. A Designated Community is defined by the Archive and this definition may change over time.<sup>13</sup>

Importantly, the definition of a designated community in OAIS does not state that all users must belong to the designated community. Rather, a designated community is the body of people for whose knowledge base the disclosure of information is intended to supplement. It is the group for whom the archives are mandated and resourced to serve, not the entire user

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<sup>11</sup> A recent example is the introduction in the European Union of the GDPR. See for example, Christopher Kuner, “International Organizations and the EU General Data Protection Regulation”, *University of Cambridge Faculty of Law Research Paper* No. 20 (February 1, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> The term ‘Open’ in OAIS is used to imply that standard is developed in an open forum, not that access to the Archive is unrestricted. Consumer refers to a user or researcher. Management Council of the Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems (CCSDS), *Reference Model for an Open Archival Information System (OAIS)*, Washington: NASA, June 2012): 1.13.

<sup>13</sup> Management Council of the Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems (CCSDS), *Reference Model for an Open Archival Information System (OAIS)*, Washington: NASA, June 2012): 1.11.



base. Given that IGO archives are first and foremost established to preserve the institutional memory of the organization, internal staff (and to a lesser extent representatives of the delegations of member states) can be considered the archive's designated community. External customers, including researchers and citizens, are important stakeholders and users, especially in terms of achieving democratic and institutional transparency in IGOs.<sup>14</sup>

Elizabeth Roehrlich, however, notes that one of the unfortunate consequences of this insular corporate mentality is the lack of wider access:

Yet despite this important mission, archives of multilateral and international organizations have long been overlooked by diplomatic historians. There are a number of reasons for this neglect. Established primarily as support services for internal use, these archives function as the custodian of a living institution's legislative, administrative, and scientific knowledge. Because they have fewer financial and staff resources than national archives, they are sometimes unable to accommodate large numbers of outside researchers.<sup>15</sup>

While it is natural for archivists in public archives to prioritise their policies for access with these realities in mind, corporate archivists cannot forgo a larger obligation to the citizens of the nation states they service. Whether it be for reasons of democratic or institutional accountability, the public (even if in practice that means primarily academic researchers), has a right to information providing it does not fall within certain recognized exclusions to access laws and policies, such as member or third party privacy or confidentiality. When some of that information is held in corporate archives, such as those of IGOs, access to that information can be difficult or impossible. The objective, therefore, is to provide appropriate access to different user groups (including the public) while ensuring the sensitive information is not compromised.

Fourth, given the need to consult multiple national delegations and at times achieve universal consensus, implementing proactive policies to facilitate greater public access to

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<sup>14</sup> Management Council of the Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems (CCSDS), *Reference Model for an Open Archival Information System (OAIS)*, Washington: NASA, June 2012): 2.4-2.5.

<sup>15</sup> Elisabeth Roehrlich, "International Organizations during the Cold War: Insights from Archives and Oral History Interviews," *Wilson Center*, February 23, 2017. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/international-organizations-during-the-cold-war>

institutional records can be a prolonged process. Noting the complexities of declassification at the IAEA, Roehrlich observes:

Because numerous states have a say in the process, the declassification of records at the archives of international organizations takes longer than at national archives. This leads to the counterintuitive fact that some records produced by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)—an autonomous organization linked to the UN—can be accessed at member states' archives, yet remain closed, or are derestricted much later, at the IAEA.<sup>16</sup>

As such, the IGO archivist is also called upon to fulfill the role of global diplomat, charged with navigating diverse national and institutional interests. To be successful and advance the cause of greater access, archivists in IGOs must form and sustain relationships that transcend national boundaries and build effective coalitions between national delegations and key stakeholders in the organization's bureaucracy. This, in turn, requires balancing diverse sensitivities around national security, prestige and ego, and ensuring that the archives remains a trusted repository for securing institutional memory.

## 2. The Corporate Archivist

Archivists, regardless of the location or the type of institution they are employed at, have a collective identity and adhere to professional standards that guide their day-to-day activities. The *Universal Declaration on Archives*, for example, declares that; “Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizen's rights and enhances the quality of life.”<sup>17</sup> To fulfil these lofty objectives, archivists are enjoined to make records “accessible to everyone, while respecting the pertinent laws and the rights of individuals, creators, owners and users.”<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, the International Council on Archives's *Code of Ethics* declares that a principal responsibility of any archivist is

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<sup>16</sup> Roehrlich, “International Organizations during the Cold War,” <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/international-organizations-during-the-cold-war>

<sup>17</sup> International Council on Archives, *Universal Declaration on Archives*, Oslo, September 2010.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

to “promote the widest possible access to archival material.”<sup>19</sup> To accomplish this objective, archivists should “discourage unreasonable restrictions to access and use but may suggest or accept as a condition for acquisition clearly stated restrictions of limited duration.”<sup>20</sup>

Aside from their professional identity, the corporate archivist in an IGO assumes another: that of an international civil servant. This, in turn, imposes additional ethical guidelines. Upon beginning my internship at the IAEA, I was issued a copy of the *Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service*. The standard entreats civil servants to “share the vision of their organizations...it guarantees that they will place the interests of their organizations above their own and use its resources in a responsible manner.”<sup>21</sup> Additionally, archivists in an international institution must remain impartial; specifically, they must remain “independent of any authority outside their organization...they should not seek nor should they accept instructions from any Government.”<sup>22</sup> Neither are archivists in their role as civil servants to assist external parties, institutional or private, in their dealings with their organization in situations where it “might lead to actual or perceived preferential treatment.”<sup>23</sup>

The role of archivists as corporate bureaucrats bears further consideration. To give an extreme example, Michelle Caswell analyzes the role of archivists as bureaucrats in the context of the Khmer Rouge and argues for the complicity of archivists in that genocide. Caswell argues further that as individuals and as a profession, archivists “bear responsibility for, and complicity in, the overarching end goal of the system.”<sup>24</sup> She implores archivists not to become “thoughtless cogs” in a bureaucratic machine, but rather to remember our deeper

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<sup>19</sup> International Council on Archives, *Code of Ethics*, Beijing, General Assembly (Session XIII), 6 September 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> International Civil Service Commission, *Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service*, New York: United Nations, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> International Civil Service Commission, *Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service*, New York: United Nations, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Michelle Caswell, “Hannah Arendt’s World: Bureaucracy, Documentation, and Banal Evil,” *Archivaria* 70 (Fall 2010): 23.

responsibility to society as one of many co-creators of memory.<sup>25</sup> Using the example of Amnesty International, Bruce Montgomery summarizes the value of the records of IGOs insofar as:

The loss of such documents means in many instances the loss of historical truth and memory, the victory of disinformation, and in the end, the conquest of the political manipulation of history. The preservation of the records of Amnesty and other human rights organizations represent one powerful counterbalance to this prospect.<sup>26</sup>

The balancing act described above between corporate loyalty and individual conscience is a question of archival ethics. It is a topic that has been fiercely contested in the archival literature. For example, in a Letter to the Editor in *American Archivist*, Richard Cox wondered “how the individual functioning as an archivist or records manager can work in the corporate environment in any realistic way, adhering to any sense of professional ethics or mission.”<sup>27</sup> Elaborating on these themes in a later article, Cox observes that many corporate archivists feel a stronger sense of corporate loyalty, manifested through an ultra-sensitivity to criticism of their employers, as opposed to a wider obligation to the societies and communities they live in. Indeed, Cox is generally dismissive of ethics codes as a solution to the situation given the inherent nature of corporations. While Cox’s focus is primarily on for-profit corporations, it is possible to extend this critique to the non-profit sector. In the worst-case scenario, he concludes that; “Ethics codes can become useless in the corporate environment that has spun out of control.”<sup>28</sup> For Verne Harris, archivists are first and foremost memory activists. They are not, nor should they pretend to be, impartial custodians; they have agency to either silence or create space for voices that have previously been

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<sup>25</sup> Caswell, “Hannah Arendt’s World,” 24.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce P. Montgomery, “Archiving human rights: The records of amnesty international USA,” *Archivaria* 39 (1995): 129.

<sup>27</sup> Richard J. Cox, “American archivist cover controversy,” *American Archivist* 68, no.1 (2005): 10.

<sup>28</sup> Richard J. Cox, “Archival Ethics: The Truth of the Matter,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 59, no. 7 (2008): 1130-31.

suppressed.<sup>29</sup> Harris, therefore, is equally skeptical of the utility of ethics codes. He argues that “professional codes of ethics would not be much use in the hurly-burly of daily work” given the tension between a desire to be an activist while managing a bureaucratic enterprise with its “discourses of business process, information systems, efficient management, protection of privacy, and security of information.”<sup>30</sup>

Other scholars, such as Leonard McDonald, echo this theme, arguing that in the corporate world “the archivist still tends to adopt the role of the medieval archivist—defending his master’s claims to intellectual property against attack by others.”<sup>31</sup> In contrast to Cox, Andrew Abela argues that the challenge for archivists is not that there is “something inherently unethical about corporations, but [the] difficulties with the field of ethics itself.”<sup>32</sup> It is incumbent on archivists as individuals and collectively as a profession to examine their own codes of ethics, that in turn necessitates an analysis of the semantics of the term ‘ethics’ and ‘ethical’. He advises the creation of an ethics case database, stronger mentorship programs, and the incorporation of stakeholder theory into archival practice.<sup>33</sup>

One of the common challenges faced by archives, but especially corporate archives, is the necessity of demonstrating their business value to their funders and parent organizations. Indices on return on investments in corporate archives, however, are scarce. Paul Lasewicz observes how this absence poses challenges for corporate archivists, given that:

Until tangible financial measurements that capture and quantify the monetary value of corporate history contributions are identified, a compelling, irrefutable

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<sup>29</sup> Verne Harris, “Jacques Derrida Meets Nelson Mandela: Archival Ethics at the Endgame,” *Archival Science* 11, no. 1-2 (2011): 114.

<sup>30</sup> Verne Harris, “Ethics and the Archive: ‘An Incessant Movement of Recontextualisation,’” in *Controlling the Past: Documenting Society and Institutions, Essays in Honor of Helen Willa Samuels*, ed. Terry Cook (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011): 360.

<sup>31</sup> Leonard McDonald, “Ethical dilemmas facing an archivist in the business environment: The constraints on a business archivist,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 10, no. 4 (1989): 169.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Abela, “Digesting the raisins of wrath: Business, ethics, and the archival profession,” *American Archivist* 71, no. 1 (2008): 203.

<sup>33</sup> Abela summarizes Stakeholder Theory as follows: “Stakeholder theory advocates considering the perspective of every stakeholder in the community. In the case of the archival community, this could include donors, archives owners, subjects of archives, and the public. It should also include archivists themselves”. Abela, “Digesting the raisins of wrath,” 208.

strategic value statement capable of convincing skeptical executives that corporate archives are ‘must have’ functions will remain aspirational.<sup>34</sup>

He recommends archivists leverage anniversaries to publicize the organization’s history, to control how its image and reputation is perceived both externally and internally. However, as I discuss in Chapter 3 on NATO, anniversaries are not neutral events; rather they can be contested periods where multiple stakeholders within (and sometimes external to) a corporate entity attempt to leverage the symbolic moment to reframe or reinforce an existing narrative. Corporate archivists must be realistic about the extent that they can influence this process. Additionally, archivists in IGOs must be wary of adopting a “market-centric definition of their work, [that would] potentially diminish the role of ethical considerations.”<sup>35</sup>

The Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) provides a positive example of an archives being a business asset to its organization, albeit of a private-sector corporate entity. Nevertheless, it is illustrative of the need for institutional support for the successful implementation of a corporate archival program. Deidre Simmons examines issues around access and how the HBC gradually liberalized its access policies, until the records were transferred to the custody of the Archives of Manitoba.<sup>36</sup> The major impetus for these policies was the HBC’s realization that its records were of “increasing interest to scholars who wanted access to the records and that its history could also be a valuable popular marketing asset.”<sup>37</sup>

Yet, it is important to qualify the agency of the individual archivist in a corporate and international environment. Aside from the expectations imposed on them as international civil servants, corporate archivists do not have sole authority over records management and archival procedures in any organizations. Fode and Fink observe that in many corporate

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<sup>34</sup> Paul C. Lasewicz, “Forget the Past? Or History Matters? Selected Academic Perspectives on the Strategic Value of Organizational Pasts,” *American Archivist* 78, no. 1 (2015): 75-76; Harris, “Ethics and the Archive”, 115.

<sup>35</sup> Cox, “Archival Ethics,” 1129.

<sup>36</sup> For a more detailed examination of the HBC’s archival access strategy, see: Deidre A. Simmons, “‘Custodians of a Great Inheritance’: An Account of the Making of the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, 1920-1974.” MA Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1994; Deidre Simmons, *Keepers of the Record: The History of the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives*. McGill-Queens University Press, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Simmons, ‘Custodians of a Great Inheritance’, i.

environments, either private or in the public sphere, there is a strong incentive to establish records management programmes only for records that are legally required to preserve, and not necessarily provide resources to preserve records that bear evidence to the full spectrum of an organizations decision-making processes or operations.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, there are legal restrictions on the actions that archivists can implement. For example, Ineke Deserno<sup>39</sup> notes that, “As corporate records are the property of the company, archivists cannot prevent corporate records from being destroyed or being kept inaccessible.”<sup>40</sup> Finally, there is the challenge of overcoming entrenched beliefs within an organization concerning the “potential damage to the company’s reputation that may result from public access to corporate archives.”<sup>41</sup> Establishing relationships with different internal stakeholders, nations, and a broadly defined external designated community are essential prerequisites for the success of any access program in an intergovernmental organization.

### 3. Transparency in Intergovernmental Organizations

The value of the proactive and systematic disclosure of institutional records for the purposes of making them publically accessible is that it enhances democratic and institutional transparency. From the perspective of democratic accountability, the ability to access information is a fundamental human right.<sup>42</sup> Institutional accountability, while more mundane, is equally important given that IGOs are publically funded institutions, paid for (indirectly) by the taxpayers of member states through those state’s financial contributions to

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<sup>38</sup> Henrick Fode and Jorgen Fink, “Business Archives in Scandinavia,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 27, no. 2 (1999): 55.

<sup>39</sup> Ineke Deserno is currently the NATO Archivist. During my tenure as an intern at NATO, Deserno was my supervisor.

<sup>40</sup> Ineke Deserno, “The value of international business archives: the importance of the archives of multinational companies in shaping cultural identity”, *Archival Science* no. 9 (2009): 223.

<sup>41</sup> Deserno, “The value of international business archives,” 220.

<sup>42</sup> Alvaro Herrero, “Access to Information Commitments in OGP Action Plans: A Report on the Progress of Reforms Worldwide,” *Open Government Partnership* (1 April 2015): 4. Accessed 10 September 2019. [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/1a89\\_4602.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/1a89_4602.pdf)

the institution's operating budget. Therefore, transparency defined in part as the right of citizens to access institutional corporate records must be placed at the centre of the mandate of all intergovernmental organizations. Such actions are essential if IGOs are to be perceived as legitimate, for as Nye argues:

Highly technical organizations may be able to derive their legitimacy from their efficacy alone. But the more an institution deals with broad values, the more its democratic legitimacy becomes relevant.<sup>43</sup>

Grigorescu furthers this argument, and concludes that, "Transparency is therefore not simply needed for normative reasons. Without it, [international organizations] are also less effective."<sup>44</sup>

Following Libich's model of transparency, I define transparency as a broad spectrum of practices that includes, but is not limited to, access to: an institution's mandate and objectives; data and analyses collected by or on behalf of the organization; information on decision-making processes; information about decision making processes and the decisions themselves; financial data; and any other information necessary to hold the organization accountable for its operations.<sup>45</sup> While the majority of this data may not be immediately available to the public, an institution should have clear and publically available policies with reasonable timelines around declassification and public disclosure as security, confidentiality requirements and other implications become minimized over time. Proactive records and archival management are essential to these objectives.

Access to information is essential for democratic accountability. This is even more pressing in institutions that lack a mandate expressly rooted in democratic principles (such as the IAEA), and include non-democratic member states (IAEA and to some degree, NATO).

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<sup>43</sup> Joseph Nye, "Globalization's Democratic Deficit: How to Make International Institutions More Accountable," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 4 (2001): 6.

<sup>44</sup> Alexandru Grigorescu, "Transparency of International Organizations: The Roles of Member States, International Bureaucracies and Nongovernmental Organizations," *International Studies Quarterly* Vol 51 (2007): 626.

<sup>45</sup> Jan Libich, "Should Monetary Policy Be Transparent", *Policy* 22, no. 1 (Autumn 2006): 29.



In a resolution on national security and access to information, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) emphasized that “access to information is a ‘crucial component’ of national security, as it enables the informed participation by citizens in the democratic process and government scrutiny.”<sup>46</sup> Significantly, the PACE resolution makes explicit reference to the Tshwane Principles, and supports their implementation. Tsvetelina Yordanova elaborates on this theme, observing that:

The balance between the right of information, on one hand, and the protection of the legitimate interests of the states in national security and international ‘legitimate interests’ of national security are best protected when the public is well informed about all state activities, including those that are performed in order to protect national security. All information is public by default and the limited access, when necessary, is an exemption.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, Pieter and Siemon Wezeman expand the notion of institutional accountability to include democratic oversight of security forces. They state that:

Transparency can also help prevent wasteful spending on the security forces. Furthermore, transparency serves several objectives relating to democratic oversight, accountability and resource allocation. In many countries, while such transparency exists in many or most government sectors, it is generally absent in the security and defence sectors.<sup>48</sup>

The ability of non-state actors to hold intergovernmental organizations to account through sufficient access to information of an organization’s actions is essential for preventing human rights abuses. August Reinisch observes in relation to the United Nations that:

There is a wide range of potential individual rights abuses by inter-national organizations. The increase of UN activity in the field of peace and security provides examples of potential fundamental rights infringements that are directly attributable to the world organization: UN peacekeeping or more likely peace enforcement troops might unlawfully destroy or confiscate civilian

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<sup>46</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, “National security and access to information,” Resolution 1954 (2013). <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=20190&lang=EN>

<sup>47</sup> Tsvetelina Yordanova, “The Transparency - Security Dilemma in National and International Context (A Comparative Analysis of the UN and NATO’s Transparency/Secrecy Policies),” A Paper presented at the Fourth Global Conference on Transparency Research, Lugano, Switzerland, 4-6 June 2015): 5.

<sup>48</sup> Pieter D. Wezeman and Siemon T. Wezeman, “Balancing transparency and national security”, *Stockholm International Peace Institute* (29 January 2014). Accessed 5 May 2019. <https://www.sipri.org/node/405>

property in the course of operations.<sup>49</sup>

The opportunity for human rights abuses is most apparent with NATO given its active involvement in military operations in the Balkans, North Africa, and the Middle East since the end of the Cold War. Not only citizens of member states, but individuals from these regions, have the right to know if abuses or war crimes were committed by NATO forces. Even the IAEA is not immune from criticism in this regard, as it stands accused of repeatedly downplaying the health risks of nuclear energy given its intimate relationship with the nuclear industry. For example, regarding the investigations into the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, an article in the *Guardian* noted that; “The health effects of the accident were the subject of two major conferences, in Geneva in 1995, and in Kiev in 2001. But the full proceedings of those conferences remain unpublished.”<sup>50</sup> Access to this information, held at the IAEA Archives, would go some way to repairing the Agency’s public image and establishing the extent that it did, or did not, mislead the public.

An essential prerequisite for access to information is for institutional access policies to be publically accessible. Tyyne Rae Petrowski argues that:

When it comes to developing access policies, choosing to provide information *about* access can be as important as the ways in which an archivist decides to provide access itself. This information assists researchers by letting them know from the beginning of the access process what sorts of records they are and are not able to request at a given institution. It in turn benefits archival administrators to have clear definitions for records-access levels.<sup>51</sup>

Such a measure seems not only logical but also cost-effective. Such policies pose little security threat. Yet while some IGOs, such as NATO, are relatively proactive in this regard, others, such as the IAEA, are less forthcoming in publishing their access policies.

Improvements in this area are therefore necessary.

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<sup>49</sup> August Reinisch, “Securing the Accountability of International Organizations”, *Global Governance* 7, no. 131 (2001): 132.

<sup>50</sup> Oliver Tickell, “Toxic Link: the WHO and IAEA”, *Guardian* (28 May 2009). Accessed 12 March 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/may/28/who-nuclear-power-chernobyl>

<sup>51</sup> Tyyne Rae Petrowski, “Aditus ad archivum: exploring access to Catholic diocesan archives in Canada.” MA Thesis, University of Manitoba (2016): 83.

#### 4. The Tshwane Principles: A Guiding Framework

To conclude this broad survey, I posit that the *Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information* (henceforth referred to as the Tshwane Principles<sup>52</sup>), offer a framework that IGO archives can utilize in crafting their policies regarding access to records by both internal and external users. Drafted by 22 organizations and academic institutions<sup>53</sup> under the aegis of the Open Society Foundation’s Justice Initiative, the Principles seek to provide best practices and create a new consensus around access to information based on extensive consultation with practitioners in the fields of defence, national security, human rights, and international law.<sup>54</sup> The Tshwane Principles build upon an earlier declaration, the *Johannesburg Principles* (1995), in recognizing that “access to information held by the state is a right of every person,” but provide a more comprehensive framework for determining legitimate grounds for invoking restrictions to access on the basis of national security threats with reference to national and international legal obligations.<sup>55</sup> While framed in terms of access to records of nation states, Principle 5 provides that no public authority, including security sector entities, may be exempt from disclosure requirements in right to information laws.<sup>56</sup> Intergovernmental organizations, as public bodies, are not exempted.

The Tshwane Principles recognize that access to information held in state and other public bodies is a “right of every person, and therefore that this right should be protected by

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<sup>52</sup> The Principles were finalized in a municipality outside of Pretoria, which since 2011 has been known as Tshwane. A useful summary of the Principles was published by the Open Society Foundation in; Open Society Foundation, “Understanding the Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information”, Briefing Paper (12 June 2013). Accessed 8 May 2018. <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/uploads/0bf76de3-67f4-4198-bdaf-1822b531191c/briefing-understanding-tshwane-06122013%20+sc.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> A full list can be found in the annex of *The Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information*.

<sup>54</sup> The Open Society Foundations is a network of organizations founded by George Soros in 1984, and aims to enhance tolerance, transparency and open debate. “Our History,” Open Society Foundations, accessed April 5, 2020. <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/who-we-are/our-history?#Y1984>

<sup>55</sup> Open Society Foundation, *The Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information*. (2013):

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

laws drafted with precision, and with narrowly drawn exceptions.”<sup>57</sup> The Principles are framed explicitly in terms of democratic accountability, affirming that access to state records is essential if “people are to be able to monitor the conduct of their government and to participate fully in a democratic society.”<sup>58</sup> Lack of public oversight of IGOs conditions an environment susceptible to illegal, corrupt, or fraudulent conduct that is anathema to democratic practices. Nevertheless, the framework also acknowledges that states can have a “legitimate interest in withholding certain information, including on grounds of national security” while establishing strict criteria that state and non-state actors must meet.<sup>59</sup> The guiding principle for this framework, outlined in section 3, is that:

- . No restriction on the right to information on national security grounds may be imposed unless the government can demonstrate that: (1) the restriction (a) is prescribed by law and (b) is necessary in a democratic society (c) to protect a legitimate national security interest; and (2) the law provides for adequate safeguards against abuse, including prompt, full, accessible, and effective scrutiny of the validity of the restriction by an independent oversight authority and full review by the courts.<sup>60</sup>

Building on these general criteria, Section 9 outlines in detail the conditions under which access to information can be denied on national security grounds. One of the strengths of the Tshwane Principles is that the burden for demonstrating the “legitimacy of any restriction rests with the public authority seeking to withhold information.”<sup>61</sup> Access can only be denied if such restrictions “comply with all of the other provisions of these Principles, the information is held by a public authority” and falls under one of the categories for exemption specifically listed.<sup>62</sup> These exemptions include: information about on-going defense plans, operations, and capabilities so long as they are of operational utility;<sup>63</sup> weapons and other

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 1

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>63</sup> The wording here is crucial, as it is meant to require disclosure “once the information no longer reveals anything that could be used by enemies to understand the state’s readiness, capacity, or plans.” Ibid, 8.

military or communications systems; specific measures to safeguard the territory of the state and its institutions against imminent external threats; sources and methods of intelligence services; information supplied in confidence by a foreign state or intergovernmental organization; and diplomatic communications.<sup>64</sup> Additional categories may be proposed but only if their rationale is clearly articulated and demonstrates how “disclosure of information in the [proposed] category would harm national security.”<sup>65</sup>

Principle 10 sets forth categories of information of high public interest that should be disclosed in all but the most exceptional circumstances, and only ever withheld for the shortest time necessary. These categories include laws and regulations that authorize the state to take people into custody; the location of detention centres; the existence of all military, police, security and intelligence agencies; information relevant to decisions to take military action; the possession or acquisition of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction; information about overt and covert surveillance, including statistics about the extent of surveillance; information sufficient to enable the public to understand security sector and other public finances; information about public health, safety and the environment; and information about exploitation of natural resources.<sup>66</sup>

Standards for the procedures of declassification are outlined in Principle 17 which declares that public bodies should “identify fixed periods for automatic declassification for different categories of classified information. To minimize the burden of declassification, records should be automatically declassified without review wherever possible.”<sup>67</sup> Categories of information identified in Principle 10 that are classified due to exceptional sensitivity should nevertheless be “declassified as rapidly as possible” if the information is of public interest. The Principle also notes that it is good practice for public bodies with the authority

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 9-14.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 17.

to declassify records to regularly consult “with persons with professional expertise concerning the process for establishing declassification priorities, including both automatic and en bloc declassification.”<sup>68</sup>

Another strength of the framework is that it outlines clear definitions, particularly for what constitutes a “Legitimate National Security Interest”. Under this framework, a national security interest is only legitimate if it conforms to the categories outlined in Principle 9 and is “consistent with international and national law.”<sup>69</sup> The definition also outlines what does not constitute a legitimate national security interest, including:

Protection of government or officials from embarrassment or exposure of wrongdoing; concealment of information about human rights violations, any other violation of law, or the functioning of public institutions; strengthening or perpetuating a particular political interest, party, or ideology; or suppression of lawful protests.<sup>70</sup>

This focus on human rights violations is significant as it builds upon earlier frameworks, such as the United Nations *Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights Through Action to Combat Impunity*, otherwise known as the Joinet/Orentlicher Principles. These principles enshrine four key rights for victims of human rights abuses: The Right to Know, including the responsibility of the state to preserve memory; the Right to Justice; Right to Reparations; and a Guarantee of Non-Recurrence.<sup>71</sup> One glaring omission is the absence of clear terms of reference relative to the term “National Security”. The Tshwane Principles only include a recommendation that the term be “defined precisely in national law, in a manner consistent with the needs of a democratic society.”<sup>72</sup>

Other specific principles of importance for archivists include Principle 11, which

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>71</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights Through Action to Combat Impunity*, Commission on Human Rights, Sixty-first session, Item 17 of the provisional agenda (E/CN.4/2005/102/Add.1 8 February 2005).

<sup>72</sup> Open Society Foundation, *The Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information*. (2013): 4.

states that “public authorities are obliged to state reasons for classifying information.”<sup>73</sup>

Classification should correspond to the level of potential harm from exposure relative to the risks identified in the initial justification. Determining the maximum period of classification for information at the moment a decision to secure it is taken is recommended. Principle 12 declares that the public should have “access to the written procedures and standards governing classification.”<sup>74</sup> Additionally, the public should have the opportunity to comment on the procedures and standards governing classification prior to their becoming effective.”<sup>75</sup>

Finally, Principle 7 states that:

States should devote adequate resources and take other necessary steps, such as the issuance of regulations and proper management of archives, to ensure that these Principles are observed in practice.<sup>76</sup>

### **Conclusions**

Intergovernmental organizations, such as the IAEA and NATO, are distinct legal entities operating in the international public sphere. Lacking the sovereignty that legitimizes the nation state, these institutions possess a degree of independence and influence in international governance to varying degrees. Understanding the extent of this influence, their decision-making processes, and day-to-day operations is essential not only for a perspective on the production of knowledge but more immediately in ensuring democratic and institutional accountability. Access to institutional records is a pre-requisite; the role of IGO archives in facilitating or hampering this access therefore becomes vital.

While the archivist in this setting can best be compared to their corporate counterpart in the private sector, given that the primary designated community served are the internal institutional users, they cannot neglect their obligation to the wider citizenry of their member

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 8.

states. Balancing competing interests of national delegations, institutional bureaucrats, staff members, academic researchers and other citizens of member states is a daunting challenge. Chapters 2 (IAEA) and 3 (NATO) provide practical case studies not only of existing access policies for internal and external users, but of the institutional context that either inhibits or facilitates the access to information in each respective organization.

I have argued that framing access in terms of democratic and institutional accountability is an essential obligation for the corporate archivist working in an intergovernmental context. I have posited that the Tshwane Principles provide a framework for managing the interests of national security and the right to information. While neither the IAEA nor NATO have endorsed the Tshwane Principles, they provide a useful benchmark to gauge the relative openness of each organization's respective access policies. Importantly, these Principles shift the burden for clearly justifying the refusal to disclose onto the institution and archives in question. These principles also situate transparency as a spectrum of practices, each essential to reinforcing institutional and democratic accountability, including: publication of access, declassification, and disclosure policies; clear definitions of what constitutes a legitimate threat to national security; timelines of systematic disclosure; and proper funding of records management and archival institutions to preserve and provide suitable access to an organization's institutional memory.



## Chapter 2

### Access to Archives of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

The IAEA is an understudied organization when compared to the broader historical context in which the organization has functioned... examination of the organization's role in history has been limited to the purview of a few insiders with necessarily limited perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

This chapter situates the IAEA Archives in its institutional context before turning to the policy framework governing internal and external access. The Agency has a robust policy framework governing internal access, while lacking comparable procedures for declassification and disclosure for external users. Additionally, these policies are not always publically accessible which further limits the ability of external users to effectively navigate – or even understand – the IAEA bureaucracy, with the IAEA Archives acting as a mediator in this process. Criticism of the IAEA's access policies for its institutional records has been quite pronounced over the past decade, as the above quote suggests. This perspective, however, ignores another crucial aspect of corporate access; namely, access policies for internal staff who are the principle designated community of the archives' service. The case of the IAEA, therefore, is illustrative precisely because it is contradictory.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna M. Weichselbraun, "Increasing Transparency at the IAEA Archives," *Wilson Centre Nuclear Proliferation International History Project*, Issue Brief no. 4 (March 3, 2015): 1.  
[https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/IB%234--Increasing%20Transparency%20at%20the%20IAEA%20Archives\\_0.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/IB%234--Increasing%20Transparency%20at%20the%20IAEA%20Archives_0.pdf)

## 1. Institutional Context

### Origins

The creation of the IAEA was the culmination of a decade-long process whereby the international community attempted to establish an independent, non-national authority to regulate and develop the emerging field of atomic energy. In the context of the early Cold War, however, such negotiations were conducted against the backdrop of the rivalry between the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies. Mutual suspicion and America's brief nuclear monopoly (1945-49) resulted in a series of failed initiatives. The key moment in the history of the creation of the IAEA occurred on December 8, 1953, when President Dwight Eisenhower addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations. This address, later dubbed the 'Atoms for Peace' speech, laid out Eisenhower's vision for an international agency under the auspices of the United Nations to regulate the use of atomic energy. Eisenhower proposed that the IAEA "be made responsible for the impounding, storage, and protection of the contributed fissionable and other materials."<sup>2</sup> In this way, the IAEA would act as a bank of nuclear fissionable materials whereby nuclear states would make regular contributions to be distributed to non-nuclear nations for peaceful development. A year after Eisenhower's address, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously passed the 'Atoms for Peace' Resolution on December 4, 1954 that outlined the process for multinational negotiations. After two years of intense negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, the IAEA *Statute* was passed and signed on October 23, 1956 and October 26, 1956 respectively. Vienna was selected as the agency's headquarters as it was "on the frontier between Western and Soviet spheres of influence, [and] was acceptable to both Washington and Moscow."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Eisenhower, Dwight D. "Atoms for Peace" Address Before the General Assembly of the United Nations on Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy, New York City, December 8th, 1953.

<sup>3</sup> David Fischer, *History of the Atomic Energy Agency: The First Forty Years* (Vienna: IAEA, 1997), 49.

The establishment of the IAEA, like NATO, was a product of the early Cold War geopolitical struggle between the USSR and the USA. However, unlike NATO, the creation of the IAEA was also influenced by decolonisation. Elizabeth Roehrlich argues that, concerning the proposed IAEA safeguards regime, there was a divergence of priorities between the superpowers and the emerging post-colonial states. The United States and the Soviet Union prioritized the management of the accelerating arms race, while nations from the global south prioritized issues of voting power (and by extension influence) within international organizations, and were concerned that safeguards would “jeopardise national sovereignty or slow down nuclear progress in the developing world.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Mandate of the IAEA**

The purpose of the IAEA is outline in the IAEA *Statute*, Article II: Objectives, which states that:

The Agency shall seek to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health, and prosperity throughout the world. It shall ensure, so far as it is able, that assistance provided by it or at its request or under its supervision or control is not used in such a way as to further any military purposes.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, the IAEA’s Mission Statement outlines three primary objectives for the Agency. These including providing guidance to member states on how to “us[e] nuclear science and technology for various peaceful purposes, including the generation of electricity,” developing nuclear safety standards to protect human health and the environment against ionizing radiation, and verifying compliance of member states’ commitments under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and other agreements through regular inspections.<sup>6</sup> It is

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<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Roehrlich, “The Cold War, the developing world, and the creation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), 1953–1957,” *Cold War History* 16, no. 2 (2016): 211.

<sup>5</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “Statute,” October 23, 1956 (amended December 28, 1989). Accessed March 25, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> “The IAEA Mission Statement,” IAEA, May 26, 2014, accessed April 5, 2018. <https://www.iaea.org/about/mission>.

important to note that while historically the IAEA has mainly sought to apply safeguards on nuclear programs, it did not evolve into the ‘nuclear bank’ originally outlined by Eisenhower in his ‘Atoms for Peace’ address.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of the safeguards regime that the IAEA administers is to ensure that Member States are “honouring their international legal obligations to use nuclear material and technology only for peaceful purposes.”<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, verification is meant to deter the spread of nuclear weapons through an early-warning system of monitoring the evolution of national nuclear programs. Its legal foundation are the bilateral safeguards agreements between the IAEA and Member States. This authority is vested in Article III.A.5 of the IAEA *Statute*, whereby the Agency is charged:

To establish and administer safeguards designed to ensure that special fissionable and other materials, services, equipment, facilities, and information made available by the Agency or at its request or under its supervision or control are not used in such a way as to further an military purpose; and to apply safeguards, at the request of the parties, to any bilateral or multilateral arrangement, or at the request of a State, to any of that State’s activities in the field of atomic energy.<sup>9</sup>

The IAEA *Statute* has been criticized for not being comprehensive enough. As early as 1959, John Stoessinger warned that the *Statute* was woefully inadequate since:

Agency controls do *not* in practice apply to the nuclear countries; they do not apply to countries developing national atomic programs without Agency help; and they do *not* apply to bilateral and regional arrangements established outside the Agency.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, the IAEA is limited its ability to operate without the consent or agreement of its member states. Article III.D of the IAEA *Statute* states that “The activities of the Agency

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<sup>7</sup> Fischer, *History of the Atomic Energy Agency*, 451.

<sup>8</sup> “Safeguards and verification,” IAEA, June 8, 2016, accessed November 5, 2018.

<https://www.iaea.org/topics/safeguards-and-verification>

<sup>9</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, *Statute* (Vienna: IAEA, October 23, 1956/amended December 28, 1989): Article III.A.5

<sup>10</sup> Italics in article. John G. Stoessinger, “The International Atomic Energy Agency: The First Phase,” *International Organization* 13, no. 3 (Summer, 1959): 408.

shall be carried out with due observance of the sovereign rights of States.”<sup>11</sup> Given these limitations in the IAEA’s mandate, David Fischer concludes that, “For nearly forty years after its birth in 1957 the IAEA remained essentially irrelevant to the nuclear arms race.”<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, the IAEA lacks an explicit democratic mandate in its *Statute*. As such, it is perhaps more useful to frame discussions of public access to IAEA records around institutional transparency and accountability, especially since not all member states are democracies. Article VIII of the IAEA *Statute* is key to this framework, as it states that:

The Agency shall assemble and make available in an accessible form the information made available to it...It shall take positive steps to encourage the exchange among its members of information relating to the nature and peaceful uses of atomic energy and shall serve as an intermediary among its members for this purpose.<sup>13</sup>

However, the *Statute* also imposes explicit restrictions on access to information, most notably in Article VII.F. which declares that Agency staff “shall not disclose any industrial secret or other confidential information coming to their knowledge by reason of their official duties for the Agency.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Structure of the IAEA**

The IAEA is composed of a Board of Governors, the General Conference, and the agency Secretariat. The Board of Governors is the executive organ of the agency, currently composed of 35 member states on a rotating basis. It sets the broad policy objectives of the Agency, and is authorized to approve all safeguards agreements, safety standards, and authorize projects in member states. Additionally, the Board drafts the annual budget and reviews reports on the activities of its subordinate committees. The General Conference is

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<sup>11</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, *Statute* (Vienna: IAEA, October 23, 1956/amended December 28, 1989): Article III.D.

<sup>12</sup> David Fischer served on the IAEA’s Preparatory Commission. From 1957 until 1981 he was the Agency’s Director and Assistant Director General for External Relations. In 1981 and 1982 he was Special Adviser to Director General Eklund and to Hans Blix. Fischer, *History of the Atomic Energy Agency*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, *Statute* (Vienna: IAEA, October 23, 1956/amended December 28, 1989): Article VIII.C.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, Article VII.F.

composed of delegates of every member state and meets once a year.<sup>15</sup> It has the power to review the annual work of the agency by adopting or rejecting reports submitted by the Board of Governors, recommends future programmes, approves applications for membership, and elect members to the Board of Governors. The agency's budget must be approved by the General Conference.<sup>16</sup>

The Secretariat oversees the day-to-day management of the Agency and is headed by the Secretary General. The IAEA has six departments under the authority of the Director General's Office for Coordination, that report directly to the Office of the Director General. These departments include the Department of Technical Cooperation, Nuclear Energy, Nuclear Safety and Security, Management, Nuclear Sciences and Applications, and Safeguards. The Archives and Records Management Section (ARMS), of which the IAEA Archives is a subordinate unit, is in the Department of Management which is responsible for providing a "platform of services that enable the IAEA to successfully deliver its scientific and technical programmes."<sup>17</sup> The Department of Management is in turn divided into five divisions: Budget and Finance, General Services, Conference and Document Services, Human Resources, and Information Technology. Each division is divided into sections. The IAEA Archives is located under the Division of General Services.<sup>18</sup> In addition to its headquarters in Vienna, the IAEA also has regional offices in Toronto, Canada (since 1979) and Tokyo, Japan (since 1984), as well as two liaison offices in New York City, United States (since 1957) and Geneva, Switzerland (since 1965). Finally, the Agency runs

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<sup>15</sup> There 171 member states as of March 2020. "List of Member States," IAEA, September 5, 2019, accessed April 2, 2020. <https://www.iaea.org/about/governance/list-of-member-states>

<sup>16</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, *Statute* (Vienna: IAEA, October 23, 1956/amended December 28, 1989), Article V; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, *Guide to Archives of Intergovernmental Organizations* (Paris: UNESCO, April 1999): 105.

<sup>17</sup> "Department of Management," IAEA, August 17, 2016, accessed April 4, 2018. <https://www.iaea.org/about/organizational-structure/department-of-management>

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed examination of the IAEA's organization structure and the place of the ARM within it, see Appendix I: Figures 2.1-2.3. "Department of Management," IAEA, August 17, 2016, accessed April 4, 2018. <https://www.iaea.org/about/organizational-structure/department-of-management>

laboratories specialized in nuclear technology in Seibersdorf (Austria), and in Monaco. These various centers of record generation pose an additional challenge for the Archives to manage.<sup>19</sup>

### **IAEA Archives**

The mandate of the IAEA Archives is to manage the “Agency’s institutional memory and preserve the official records documenting its programme activities and its historical material in a variety of media.”<sup>20</sup> It is empowered to establish a “framework for the creation and management of authentic, reliable and useable records, capable of supporting Agency business functions and activities for as long as they are required.”<sup>21</sup> In the process, the IAEA Archives documents the history and administrative structure of the IAEA, its policies and procedures; programme activities; official records of the IAEA Policy-Making Organs (Board of Governors and General Conference), and other agreements and treaties with external agencies and governments. However, the Archives does not have authority over all Agency records; importantly, records and reports concerning safeguards inspections of nuclear facilities in member states are managed separately by the Department of Safeguards.

The IAEA Archives manages over 10,000 linear meters of records in various media, including analogue reports, audio-visual materials in the form of films, sound recordings and photographs, and architectural plans. The Archives is divided into eight distinct collections: Central Registry Records, Coordinated Records Management System Collection, Departmental Records (Part One and Two), Audio-Visual Collection, Publications, Records of IAEA Policy-Making Organs and Legal Instruments, and Various Other Collections.<sup>22</sup>

While summaries of these collections are available on the Archives website, accompanied by

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<sup>19</sup> “History,” IAEA, June 8, 2016, accessed March 17, 2018. <https://www.iaea.org/about/overview/history>

<sup>20</sup> “Archives,” IAEA, July 15, 2016, accessed March 17, 2018. <https://www.iaea.org/resources/archives>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> “Structure of IAEA Archival Holdings,” IAEA, October 14, 2016, accessed March 17, 2018. <https://www.iaea.org/resources/archives/structure>

brief administrative histories and information concerning the conditions of access, there are no finding aids online to enhance external access.

The Archives provides access to authorized users, including internal staff and external researchers. These records support the “legal, operational, audit and fiscal responsibilities of the IAEA” necessary for the Agency’s proper functioning.<sup>23</sup> The Archives’ mandate positions it as a corporate archives. While it is authorized to provide public access to agency records, its policies mainly focus on internal records management and the proper handling and access of classified information by staff. There is no declaration of a larger public role or societal obligation to disclose information on the Agency’s activities to the public.

## 2. Policy Framework

### Internal Access

The IAEA has a robust policy framework governing internal access by staff to classified information. As in other corporate environments, the primary users are internal staff who can therefore be considered the IAEA Archives’ designated community. Policies for the management of information at the IAEA are detailed in the IAEA “Administrative Manual Part VIII, Section 4: Archives and Records Management Section.” Of specific interest is Annex 1 which describes the rules to access agency records.<sup>24</sup> Other authorities include the “Archives and Records Management (ARM) Handbook” and the IAEA’s “Information Security Policy and Procedures Manual.”<sup>25</sup>

While most of the information produced or obtained by the Agency is marked unclassified, the policies prioritize the proper management of classified information. This management is framed in terms of maintaining the trust of member states and the defense of

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<sup>23</sup> “Archives,” IAEA, July 15, 2016, accessed March 17, 2018. <https://www.iaea.org/resources/archives>

<sup>24</sup> “Archives,” IAEA, July 15, 2016, accessed March 17, 2018. <https://www.iaea.org/resources/archives>

<sup>25</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “IAEA Archives Factsheet,” Accessed March 16, 2018. [https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/16/10/archives\\_resources\\_-\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/16/10/archives_resources_-_factsheet.pdf)



the Agency’s reputation. The “Information Security Policy and Procedures Manual” declares that, “Each staff member is responsible for the protection of classified information”.<sup>26</sup> This responsibility forms the “foundation upon which the integrity of the Agency as a credible and effective organization must stand.”<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that in these policies classifications are determined by the originator or originating body, and declassification can only be authorized with their consent. Staff undertake to manage information appropriately and to release it where appropriate. Managing access to information is an essential pre-requisite to “ensure Member States’ confidence and co-operation in promoting the exchange of information.”<sup>28</sup> The IAEA has a three-tiered system of classified information: Restricted, Confidential, Highly Confidential. These classifications correspond to the relative damage unauthorized disclosure would cause to the Agency’s interests, summarized in the table below.

Table 2.1: IAEA Categories of Classified Information<sup>29</sup>

Restricted	Unauthorized access could be prejudicial (cause embarrassment or inconvenience) to the interests of the Agency.
Confidential	Unauthorized access could cause serious damage (weaken or impair) to the interests to the Agency.
Highly Confidential	Unauthorized access could cause grave, extensive, or irreparable damage to the interests of the Agency.

In addition to the three markings for classified information, secondary markings may be applied at the discretion of the responsible Department or Division with the consent of Departmental Classification Officers and the Agency Classification Officer. These additional markings fall into three broad categories summarized in the table below: sensitivity,

<sup>26</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “Information Security Policy and Procedures Manual”,

<sup>27</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “Information Security Policy and Procedures Manual”,

<sup>28</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “Information Security Policy and Procedures Manual”, 2.

<sup>29</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “Information Security Policy”, AM.II/19 (2015): B.1.2.

distribution, and outer markings.

Table 2.2: IAEA Additional Markings<sup>30</sup>

Sensitivity Markings	Appear only on the front page of a document and indicate specific sensitivities. These markings may be the same as those that appear on the outer cover (envelope).
Distribution Markings	Appear on the front page of the document itself as a permanent reminder of any specific handling requirements.  The markings “Official Use Only” and “Available for Public Use” are to be used only with information that is not classified.
Outer Markings	Additional markings may be placed on the outer packaging of documents/information (envelope or electronic equivalent) and may specify to the recipient who is authorized to open the document if this is different from the standard instructions.

Declassification may be requested by any division. The Departmental Classification Officer in the originating division reviews the request. If approved, a notice of declassification is issued describing the documents and date, and the document is marked: “Declassified by authority of a declassification notice dated YYYY-MM-DD”. Highly Confidential documents that are declassified must also bear the signature of the Records Clerk, who retains the original document in their custody. Additionally, special procedures may be applied regarding information about the international transfer of nuclear material or dissemination of information during nuclear or radiological emergencies.<sup>31</sup>

Access to classified information for internal users is governed on a need-to-know principle when such information is determined to be “required for the carrying out of his/her

<sup>30</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “Information Security Policy”, AM.II/19 (2015): B.1.3.

<sup>31</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “Information Security Policy”, AM.II/19 (2015): B.1.18

Agency responsibilities.”<sup>32</sup> Heads of Sections of Divisions have ultimate authority over determining this principle on a case-by-case basis. In the case of the IAEA Archives, access is granted after a written request is submitted by a Section Head specifying the “name of the person to be granted access and the information or range of information required.”<sup>33</sup>

Historical (i.e. non-current) records must be consulted in the reading room; non-digital records cannot be circulated due to preservation concerns but may be reproduced by archival staff. Access is less restricted in cases when units request semi-current un-classified records that they created or transferred to the Archives. In such instances, records are loaned back to their originating body for a maximum period of 30 days. Finally, all staff have access to non-classified historical records that can be consulted in the Archives reading room.<sup>34</sup>

### **External Access**

Access to IAEA records by individuals external to the Agency are detailed in the Reading Room Protocol. Unclassified archival and semi-current records may be consulted provided they are more than 30 years old. Access to unclassified records that are fewer than 30 years old (archival and semi-current) may be requested if the request is endorsed by the national delegation of the requestor, and with the written permission of the Director General or their delegated representatives. Similarly, access to classified information (regardless of the age of the record), must be granted by the Director General.<sup>35</sup>

Physical access to the IAEA Archives is also tightly controlled. Visitors must have an appointment, requiring the submission of a research form, signed reading room protocol, and letter of support at least one month prior to their requested visiting dates. As the IAEA Headquarters are located at the United Nations’ Vienna International Centre, all visitors must

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<sup>32</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “Information Security Policy”, AM.II/19 (2015): B.1.6.

<sup>33</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “Information Security Policy”, AM.II/19 (2015): B.1.7.

<sup>34</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA Archives, “Archives and Records Management Handbook”.

<sup>35</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “Archives Reading Room Protocol,” accessed June 17, 2019.

[https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/17/01/iaea\\_archives\\_reading\\_room\\_protocol.pdf](https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/17/01/iaea_archives_reading_room_protocol.pdf)

present a valid photo ID, undergo a security check, and register with UN security personal to gain access to the Archives. It is permitted to photocopy records under the supervision of archival staff in the reading room. Digital cameras and phones are allowed, though flash photography is forbidden. However, the use of mobile scanning devices requires the permission of the Supervisor of the Archives.<sup>36</sup>

### **Access Beyond Policy**

The IAEA does not have a public outreach or exhibition program comparable to NATO. However, there have been tentative efforts to increase digital access to the Agency's collections by enhancing the Archives' online presence through a photo digitization and Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) project.<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Kata, an archivist at the IAEA, frames these initiatives as essential steps to complying with the Agency's mandate to share information on Article VIII of its *Statute*. The purpose of these projects is to “unify and improve finding aids and search capabilities by standardizing metadata, thereby providing unmediated access to images and their metadata.”<sup>38</sup> To date, the IAEA has relied on its publications and platforms such as Flickr and Instagram to provide access to a selection of its photographic collection. However, as Kata notes these efforts are insufficient. There is:

No place for staff or the public to centrally search for and view images. The historical photographic collection consists of about 30,000 images, only about 20% of which had been catalogued in a legacy database, and only a small percentage had been digitised on an ad hoc basis.<sup>39</sup>

By assembling the historical and digital photographs in a single online database with extensive metadata to enable easy user queries, these projects will hopefully enable a broadened perspective on the “current and historical uses of nuclear technologies and

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<sup>36</sup> “Visiting the IAEA Archives,” IAEA, December 7, 2016, accessed October 10, 2019.

<https://www.iaea.org/resources/archives/access/visits>

<sup>37</sup> During my internship at the IAEA Archives, I participated in both the photo digitization and DAMS projects.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Kata, “Atomic evolution: making the visual history of nuclear applications accessible,” *ARC Magazine* No. 349, (Taunton: Archives and Records Association (United Kingdom and Ireland), September 2018): 36.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

recommitting to the transfer of knowledge.”<sup>40</sup> As of 2020, these initiatives have only been partially implemented. While the historical photographic collection consisting of 30,000 images has successfully been digitized, to date the DAMS has not been fully implemented; as such, only a selection of the photographs has been published online.<sup>41</sup> It remains to be seen how successful these access initiatives will be.

### 3. Limitations of IAEA Access Policies

Attempts to promote the declassification and disclosure of agency records has occasioned a protracted debate within the organization. In a leaked document summarizing a meeting of the Board of Governors on 15 February 1996, the Board discussed a proposal to derestrict certain records of Board of Governors for the purposes of public disclosure. The proposal framed the issue explicitly around enhancing and broadening the definition of transparency within the IAEA to bring it in line with current practices within the UN system.

It noted that:

The trend within the United Nations system generally, as within the Agency, is towards greater transparency, and the general practice in the United Nations and its specialized agencies is to make documents comparable to the documents of the Board and its Committee widely available unless there are compelling reasons for not doing so.<sup>42</sup>

Specifically, the proposal recommended that records of the Board and its committees be derestricted (up to 1993 with immediate effect; records from 1994 derestricted as of 1 January 1997) and made available for public access two years after their date of issue. The Board was vested with the discretion to vary the length of time for derestriction in specific

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>41</sup> See for example: “From the IAEA archives: setting up the first nuclear science laboratory”, IAEA, August 23, 2019, accessed February 20, 2020. <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/multimedia/photogallery/from-the-iaea-archives-setting-up-the-first-nuclear-science-laboratory>; “From the IAEA archives: the mobile isotope laboratory”, IAEA, September 3, 2019, accessed February 20, 2020. <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/multimedia/photogallery/from-the-iaea-archives-the-mobile-isotope-laboratory>; “Marine Environment Laboratories, Monaco”, November 21, 2019, accessed February 20, 2020. <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/multimedia/photogallery/marine-environment-laboratories-monaco>

<sup>42</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, GOV/2843... Accessed from <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb512/docs/EBB-IAEA-leaked%20document.pdf>

cases (that is, to less or more than two years). An exemption to this general program was the annual Safeguards Implementation Report and documents on the deliberations of closed sessions of the Board, although the option of derestricting these records at a later date was included provided the “grounds for maintenance of the restriction no longer exists.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite the proposal being adopted by the Board, derestriction and disclosure proved to be a prolonged process. Nearly a decade later, researchers were still bemoaning the fact that the best method of obtaining “IAEA records is by seeking them in the archives of member governments.”<sup>44</sup> The decision was reviewed and confirmed in 2009, and again in 2016, when the Australian permanent mission to the United Nations and the IAEA submitted a memorandum before the Board of Governors on the issue of public access, and in particular, how best to implement the Board’s 1996 decision. While observing that records up to the year 2000 had been reviewed and, for the most part, derestricted, the delegation nevertheless urged the Board to “keep under review progress towards achieving the earliest possible implementation of the 1996 decision.”<sup>45</sup>

The Australian permanent representative recommended the Board clarify and regularize declassification procedures and bring them in line with comparable organizations (such as NATO), and streamline the requirements for access to non-restricted material.<sup>46</sup> Additional measures, such as the development of detailed finding aids, were also recommended. The Australian mission justified these recommendations in language nearly identical to the Board of Governors proposal, a decade prior:

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<sup>43</sup> IAEA, Board of Governors, GOV/2843 “Proposal for the Derestriction of Board Documents,” February 15, 1996. Accessed from *National Security Archives*, accessed on June 16, 2019.

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb512/docs/EBB-IAEA-leaked%20document.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Toby McIntosh and William Burr, “International Atomic Energy Agency Lacks Transparency, Observers and Researchers Say,” *National Security Archive*, April 24, 2015, accessed March 21, 2018.

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb512/>

<sup>45</sup> Australian Embassy and Permanent Mission to the United Nations, Austria, “BOG\_Archives\_10032016,” accessed November 9, 2019. [https://austria.embassy.gov.au/vien/BOG\\_Archives\\_10032016.html](https://austria.embassy.gov.au/vien/BOG_Archives_10032016.html)

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

The trend has been towards more liberal policies on derestriction, more regular review of classification and on greater public access. This is both a path to greater transparency and helps to limit the rapid accumulation of records that is straining available resources. The Board should support, and encourage, the Agency in addressing these challenges.<sup>47</sup>

That this proposal was initiated by a national delegation is significant in that it demonstrates that not all member states are opposed to broadening the IAEA's definition of transparency to encompass greater public access to the Agency's records. Therefore, there is an opportunity to revise the IAEA's declassification and public disclosure policies to bring them in line with other intergovernmental organizations in the security sector.

The release of the Board of Governors records is an important step in promoting greater transparency at the IAEA by allowing external users to analyze the IAEA's decision-making process. Nevertheless, the Agency has not adopted a more expansive framework for transparency, limiting itself to discussions around its financial accountability and efficiency in the use of the resources of member states.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, the IAEA is quite proactive in insisting on the disclosure of information by member states as a necessary pre-requisite of transparency. Jacob Hamblin is highly critical of what he perceives as the hypocrisy of the Agency in its calls for transparency, arguing that "for all the IAEA's demands for openness [by member states], peering into the organization's workings and history is like trying to prise open an impossibly stubborn black box."<sup>49</sup>

While there is a dearth of academic studies on the IAEA Archives itself, there is no shortage of criticisms, especially amongst external researchers, concerning the limitations of its access policies. The sense of frustration is palpable. Anna Weichselbraun, for example,

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<sup>47</sup> Australian Embassy and Permanent Mission to the United Nations, Austria, "BOG\_Archives\_10032016," accessed November 9, 2019. [https://austria.embassy.gov.au/vien/BOG\\_Archives\\_10032016.html](https://austria.embassy.gov.au/vien/BOG_Archives_10032016.html)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "Efficiency and Transparency," IAEA, February 5, 2015, accessed 4 April 2019.

<https://www.iaea.org/about/efficiency>

<sup>49</sup> Jacob Hamblin, "The IAEA demands nations open up to its inspectors, yet is itself a tightly shut box," *The Conversation*, May 15, 2014, accessed March 20, 2018. <http://theconversation.com/the-iaea-demands-nations-open-up-to-its-inspectors-yet-is-itself-a-tightly-shut-box-of-secrets-25687>

argues that “Researchers seeking to consult records at the IAEA Archives currently face significant barriers to access.”<sup>50</sup> Marko Miljkovic echoes these criticisms, observing that:

Aside from a few works on the IAEA’s evolution as an international organization, however, the Agency’s complex and multilayered role in the proliferation of nuclear technology...has not been investigated, due mostly to the relative inaccessibility of the Agency’s records and related material.<sup>51</sup>

Miljkovic identifies the two greatest obstacles to access as the understaffing of the archives and the lack of finding aids. While he notes that some general catalogues are available for consultation in the reading room, he nevertheless concludes that “without direct access to the finding aids, researcher[s] face unnecessary obstacles in their research.”<sup>52</sup> However, some of his criticisms are surprising. For instance, Miljkovic bemoans the fact that the majority of the IAEA Archives’ records are “official correspondence between the Agency staff of various ranks and the representatives of member countries.”<sup>53</sup> Considering that the mandate of the IAEA Archives is to preserve the Agency’s corporate memory by “document[ing] the history and administrative structure of the IAEA, as well as its policies and procedures; programme activities; official records of the IAEA Policy-Making Organs (Board of Governors and General Conference); and agreements relevant for the Agency’s work and treaties under IAEA auspices”, this observation seemed not only unnecessary but irrelevant.<sup>54</sup>

The lack of transparency in the IAEA’s record keeping practices is also discussed at length by Toby McIntosh and William Burr. They in turn argue that this practice is rooted in the Agency’s deference to the preferences of its member states and their desire to limit public

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<sup>50</sup> Weichselbraun, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Marko Miljkovic, “The Researchers’ Guide to the IAEA Archives,” *Wilson Centre Nuclear Proliferation International History Project*, January 20, 2016. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/researchers-guide-to-the-iaea-archives>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, “IAEA Archives Factsheet,” Accessed March 16, 2018. [https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/16/10/archives\\_resources\\_-\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/16/10/archives_resources_-_factsheet.pdf)



access to their role in policy discussions and negotiations.<sup>55</sup> Hamblin concurs that the IAEA defers excessively to the interests of its member states, observing that; “The IAEA claims it is obliged to withhold documents until all of the countries mentioned in them agree to declassification. In practice, this guarantees permanent secrecy.”<sup>56</sup> While this is undoubtedly true, as an intergovernmental organization founded by nation states the IAEA cannot ignore or disregard the legitimate concerns of member states regarding the security of information at the Agency.

Lack of access to IAEA records, the absence of clear policies governing declassification and public disclosure, and the unwillingness of the Agency to frame institutional transparency as anything other than financial accountability are all worrying trends given that the “IAEA has become an essential pillar of the global nuclear order, strengthening international security, nuclear safety, and international cooperation on the peaceful uses of nuclear technologies.”<sup>57</sup> Through its mandate to promote the development of knowledge of nuclear energy, the IAEA is also in a unique position as both “chief salesman and chief arbiter of controversies about peaceful and military uses [of nuclear power]. It is a hammer in search of nails, but is uncomfortable with historical facts about the quality of its workmanship.”<sup>58</sup> The authority the Agency possesses in the field of nuclear knowledge is not without its consequences. Indeed, given the danger that nuclear technology poses even in its peaceful application as a source of energy (as demonstrated by the Chernobyl and Fukushima

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<sup>55</sup> Toby McIntosh and William Burr, “International Atomic Energy Agency Lacks Transparency, Observers and Researchers Say,” *National Security Archive*, April 24, 2015, accessed March 21, 2018. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb512/>

<sup>56</sup> Jacob Hamblin, “The IAEA demands nations open up to its inspectors, yet is itself a tightly shut box,” *The Conversation*, May 15, 2014, accessed March 20, 2018. <http://theconversation.com/the-iaea-demands-nations-open-up-to-its-inspectors-yet-is-itself-a-tightly-shut-box-of-secrets-25687>

<sup>57</sup> Matthew Bunn, “Essay by Matthew Bunn, Harvard University,” *H-DIPLO ISSF, ISSF Policy Roundtable 1-3 on the International Atomic Energy Statute at Sixty, November 19, 2016*, accessed January 15, 2019. [https://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-3-IAEA#Essay\\_by\\_Matthew\\_Bunn\\_Harvard\\_University](https://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-3-IAEA#Essay_by_Matthew_Bunn_Harvard_University)

<sup>58</sup> Jacob Hamblin, “The IAEA demands nations open up to its inspectors, yet is itself a tightly shut box,” *The Conversation*, May 15, 2014, accessed March 20, 2018. <http://theconversation.com/the-iaea-demands-nations-open-up-to-its-inspectors-yet-is-itself-a-tightly-shut-box-of-secrets-25687>

nuclear disasters), it is imperative the IAEA be scrutinized by as many stakeholders as possible. Hamblin argues convincingly that:

We are in the ridiculous position of asking experts at the IAEA for guidance that may or may not lead to more young men and women being placed in harm's way, simply to prevent dangerous material from falling in the wrong hands. The IAEA owes us access to its history.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, the IAEA's record as a nuclear watchdog, or champion, is not without controversy. Given the Agency's increased prominence in the aftermath of negotiations of Iran's nuclear program, there have been calls for the IAEA to be more transparent about its role in this process. Hamblin frames this discussion in terms of democratic accountability, arguing that:

If our elected officials are pushing Iran (or any country) on their nuclear programs, it is our responsibility to take a hard look at the history of the negotiations. That means reading through the detailed discussions at the IAEA, not just about Iran or Iraq, but about the whole nuclear industry.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, the IAEA remains an inadequately understood institution, and its role in the development of nuclear technology deserves better analysis. In a symposium roundtable discussion on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the IAEA, Målfrid Braut-Hegghammer argued that:

Political scientists studying nuclear technology diffusion have largely ignored the role of the IAEA. To be fair, information is hard to come by. The IAEA archives remain difficult to access. As a result, we know little about the evolving relationship between technology diffusion and non-proliferation at the institutional level and in the field.<sup>61</sup>

Echoing the call of other academics interested in the IAEA's role in the geopolitics of nuclear technology, Braut-Hegghammer concludes that reforms to the Agency's existing framework for declassification and disclosure are essential to "shed new light on a crucial international

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Målfrid Braut-Hegghammer, "Not helping: The International Atomic Energy Agency and Technical Cooperation," *H-DIPLO ISSF, ISSF Policy Roundtable 1-3 on the International Atomic Energy Statute at Sixty, November 19, 2016, accessed January 15, 2019. [https://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-3-IAEA#Essay\\_by\\_Malfrid\\_Braut-Hegghammer\\_University\\_of\\_Oslo](https://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-3-IAEA#Essay_by_Malfrid_Braut-Hegghammer_University_of_Oslo)*

organization, and inform a better understanding of the origins and evolution of the global nonproliferation regime.”<sup>62</sup>

#### 4. Adherence to the Tshwane Principles

The intergovernmental nature of the Agency, with competing national interests regarding the preservation of secrecy of national nuclear programs, makes the implementation of a proactive access policy difficult. While it is not stated explicitly, it is clear that the IAEA Archives is not vested with the authority to declassify or publically disclose IAEA records without the authorization of the originating departments, Board of Governors, or the Director General. This framework imposes structural constraints on the ability of the IAEA Archives to act as an effective advocate for proactive disclosure. The IAEA Archives are therefore at a severe disadvantage in comparison to the NATO Archives, which has a distinct governing body, the Archives Committee, composed of representatives of member states and national archivists with the authority to make recommendations directly to the North Atlantic Council.

Primarily because of these structural limitations, the IAEA falls far short of meeting the standards for public access to institutional records outlined in the Tshwane Principles which, it is important to note, the Agency does not endorse. The Agency is entitled under Section 9(v) of the Principles to restrict access to information on the basis of “Information concerning national security matters that was supplied by a foreign state or inter-governmental body with an express expectation of confidentiality.”<sup>63</sup> However, the Principles also note that this exemption can only be invoked if such “restrictions comply with all of the other provisions of these Principles.”<sup>64</sup> Additionally, it notes that it is good practice for such

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<sup>62</sup> Braut-Hegghammer, “*International Atomic Energy Agency and Technical Cooperation*,” [https://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-3-IAEA#Essay\\_by\\_Malfrid\\_Braut-Hegghammer\\_University\\_of\\_Oslo](https://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-3-IAEA#Essay_by_Malfrid_Braut-Hegghammer_University_of_Oslo)

<sup>63</sup> Open Society Foundation, *The Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information*. (2013): 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

expectations of secrecy and its duration to be confided explicitly in writing.

In this regard, the Agency has much to improve. Principle 12 declares that the public should have “access to the written procedures and standards governing classification”, while also having the opportunity to comment on the procedures and standards governing classification prior to their becoming effective.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, the IAEA does not publish most of its access policies online, aside from brief summaries. Concerning declassification procedures, Principle 17 states that public bodies should “identify fixed periods for automatic declassification for different categories of classified information. To minimize the burden of declassification, records should be automatically declassified without review wherever possible.”<sup>66</sup> The IAEA lacks clear declassification timelines for all its classified information (Restricted, Confidential, Highly Confidential), nor does it specify in detail the process to request declassification except in instances of internal requests. External users are left without clear guidelines as to how to navigate the Agency bureaucracy and national delegations. Furthermore, the Agency is not required to publish justifications as to why they refuse to declassify or disclose records, thereby violating Principle 11. Another crucial weakness is that the IAEA Archives lacks authority over safeguards records. These records are amongst the most important held at the IAEA given that the “safeguards system has been central to the Agency’s role in supporting the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty since the 1970s.”<sup>67</sup> That is not to say that the IAEA Archives does not have any safeguards records; the collection summaries online indicate that these records are included across multiple collections. However, these publically available summaries give no indication as to the extent

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Toby McIntosh and William Burr, “International Atomic Energy Agency Lacks Transparency, Observers and Researchers Say,” *National Security Archive*, April 24, 2015, accessed March 21, 2018. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb512/>

of the safeguards documentation under the Archives' custody.<sup>68</sup>

To address these weaknesses relative to the Tshwane Principles, I propose four recommendations for enhancing a wider definition of transparency that is rooted in access to IAEA archival records. First, given the appetite in the research community for greater access, one possible avenue is to rely on external lobbying to pressure the IAEA to adopt more proactive declassification and public disclosure policies. There is limited capability for internal archivists to lobby effectively within the Agency given the structural and resource constraints of the Archives section. The advantage of relying on external advocates is that historians and researchers have greater independence, and thus can be more open and blunt in their criticisms. The danger is that the image of the IAEA Archives as a trusted repository becomes compromised if its loyalties are perceived to be with external, rather than internal, stakeholders, thus compromising its ability to implement proper records and archival management practices with different record creating bodies inside the agency. To achieve this objective, strong relationships must be forged and maintained with the external researchers. Archivists at the IAEA must be careful to balance their responsibilities as international civil servants to the Agency, while fulfilling their professional obligations to enhance access wherever appropriate. Another stakeholder that could be relied upon more to lobby the Agency would be the permanent representatives of member states. Given the previous example of the memorandum of the Australian delegation to the Board of Governors, there appears to be sufficient interest in broadening the scope of access for external users among certain member states.

Second, the IAEA Archives website can be enhanced to increase the public profile of the archives. A preliminary step would be to publish on the website in a separate section all relevant policies relevant to archival and records management, in particular those policies

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<sup>68</sup> "Archival Holdings," IAEA, accessed February 29, 2020.  
[https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/16/10/archives\\_resources\\_-\\_archival\\_holdings.pdf](https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/16/10/archives_resources_-_archival_holdings.pdf)

related to declassification and public disclosure. These documents are not sensitive and pose no threat to national security. Another measure that would enhance accessibility to external researchers would be to publish online finding aids. This would allow external researchers to know exactly what they can access and reduce the intermediary role of the archivists.

Internally, it would reduce the preparatory workload of reference within the archival unit, freeing up precious resources that can be devoted to other internal projects.

Third, the IAEA could create an independent authority governing archival policies, including declassification and public disclosure, comparable to the Archives Committee at NATO (discussed in detail in Chapter Three). Currently, no such authority exists. Such a body, with authority to report directly to the Board of Governors, could provide an internal lobbying body separate from the internal bureaucracy or external researchers, to oversee records management policies and advocate for a more systematic program of declassification and disclosure. Given that membership in the IAEA is significantly greater than NATO, it would be more manageable if the composition of such a committee followed the general pattern of the Board of Governors; i.e. membership rotates and is divided between geographic regions. For the sake of simplicity, it would be convenient for membership of this committee to be composed of archival representatives from national archival authorities of current members of the Board of Governors.

Fourth, the IAEA Archives should adopt both a systematic and an ad-hoc declassification policy for external users. While it is possible for internal staff to request declassification through a clear process, no such equivalent exists for external requests apart from vague references to seeking the authorization of the Director General. This is a needlessly opaque process that only serves to discourage access requests and puts an undue burden on national delegations and the IAEA Archives staff in assisting external researchers in navigating the Agency bureaucracy.

## Conclusions

The IAEA has a strong policy framework rooted in the principle of need-to-know that governs access internally to classified information. The Agency's policy structures for external access, however, are much weaker and require considerable elaboration. The absence of a clear mandate for democratic accountability in the IAEA *Statute* is a significant barrier to promoting greater public access to the Agency's records. While there are opportunities to broaden the scope of access for the purposes of institutional accountability, these arguments are less compelling in the realm of public opinion and democratic accountability.

Additionally, the IAEA does not have the same public profile as other IGOs, such as NATO, further constraining the ability to bring public pressure to bear on the Agency to adopt an expanded definition of transparency rooted in access to institutional records.

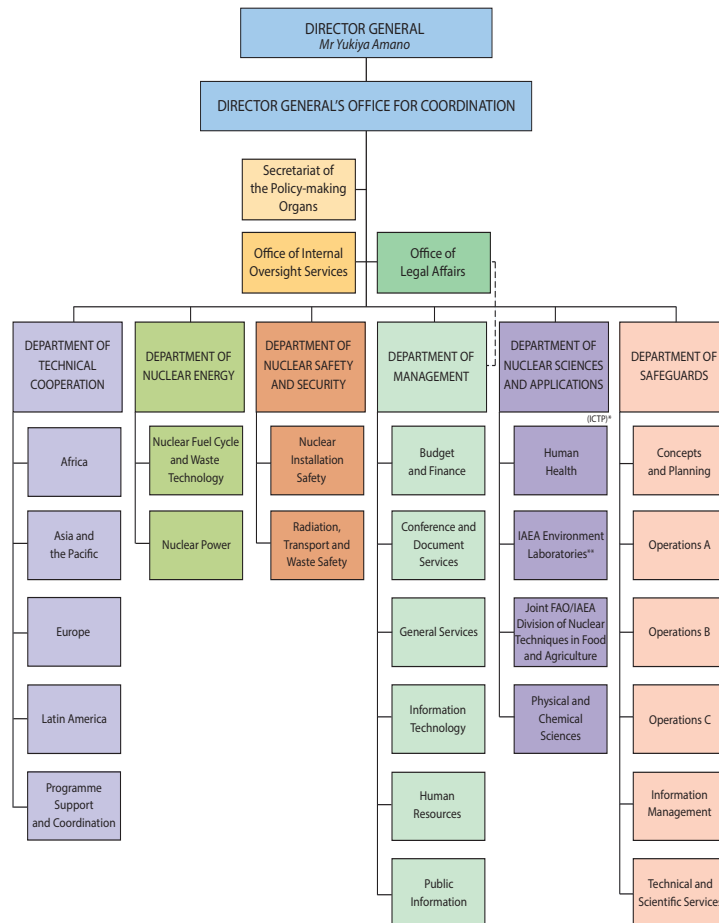
Nevertheless, important steps have been taken to enhance access to IAEA records. The derestriction of the Board of Governors records was an important milestone that eliminated one of the primary criticisms of the Agency's academic critics. It remains to be seen if the limited mandate in the IAEA *Statute* to share information among member states, coupled with efforts to broaden to Agency's conception of institutional transparency, will be sufficient to reform its declassification and public disclosure procedures.

## Appendix I

Figure 2.1: Organizational Structure of the IAEA, 2013 (Partial)<sup>69</sup>

### ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

(as of 31 December 2013)



\* The Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP), legally referred to as the "International Centre for Theoretical Physics", is operated as a joint programme by UNESCO and the Agency. Administration is carried out by UNESCO on behalf of both organizations.

\*\* With the participation of UNEP and IOC.

<sup>69</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, *IAEA Annual Report 2013*, (Vienna: IAEA, 2014): 117.



Figure 2.2: Organizational Structure of the IAEA, 2017 (Full)<sup>70</sup>

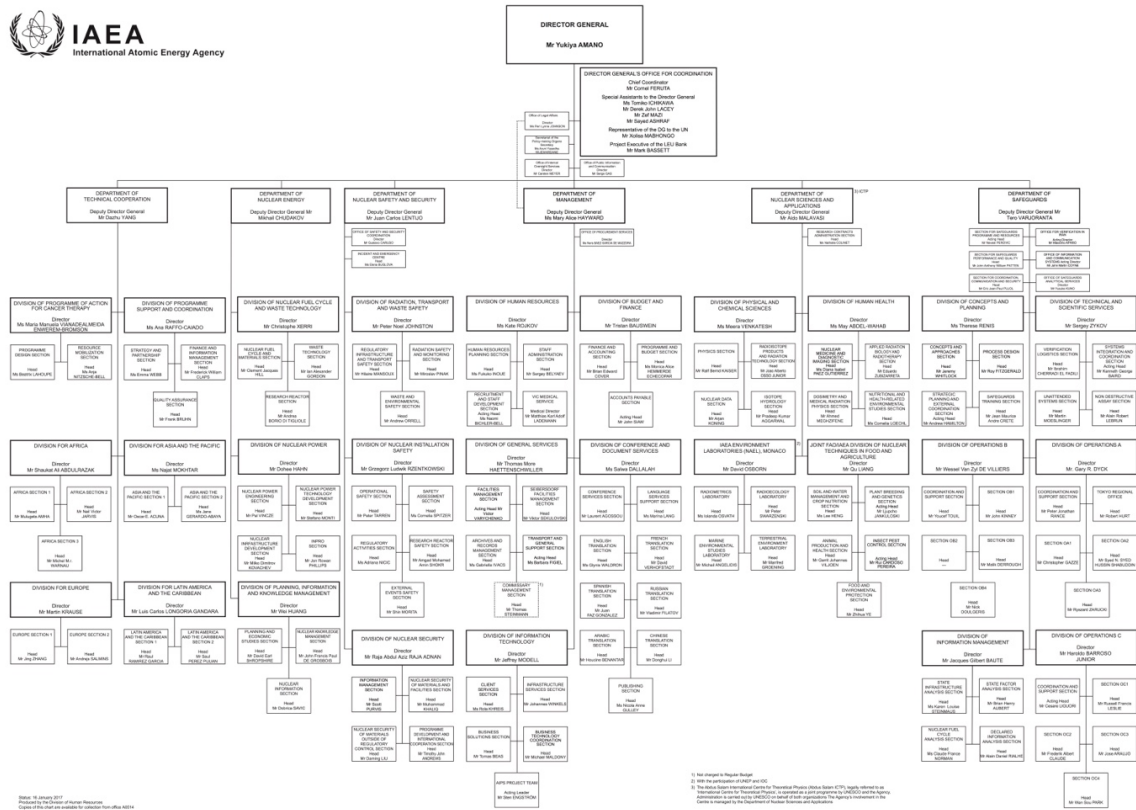
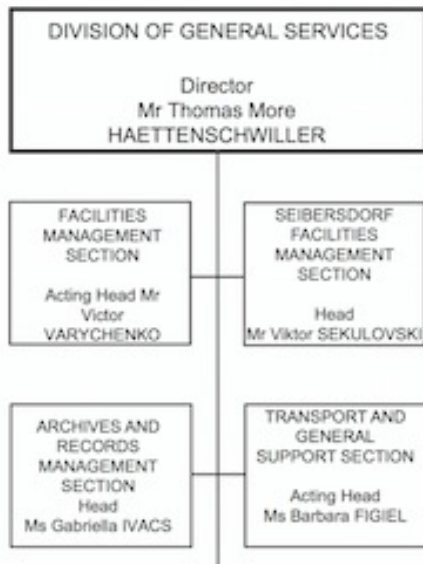


Figure 2.3: Organizational Structure of the IAEA, Division of General Services, 2017<sup>71</sup>



<sup>70</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, *IAEA Organizational Structure*. Vienna: IAEA, 2017.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 3

### Access to Archives of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Transparency is important because transparency increases trust. That's the reason why NATO is doing more to be more transparent, both when it comes to historical documents but also when it comes to everything related to how we spend our money.<sup>1</sup>

Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary-General of NATO (2014-present)

#### Introduction

The NATO Archives provide an interesting case study into the opportunities and limitations for access to archival records in IGOs. Like the IAEA Archives, internal staff are the primary designated community of the NATO Archives, with access being governed by the principle of need-to-know. Unlike its counterpart at IAEA, the NATO Archives has successfully developed a reasonably transparent process for declassifying and publically disclosing institutional records on a systematic and ad-hoc basis. These policies are framed explicitly in terms of enhancing NATO's transparency. They are easily accessible online and are complemented by an outreach program that aims to enhance the Archives public profile. Additionally, the NATO Archives possesses a unique institutional advantage in the form of the Archives Committee, an independent governing body that reports directly to NATO's highest authority, the North Atlantic Council. However, NATO is still a risk-adverse institution regarding access to records. Member states have the right to withhold public disclosure of individual records, which in turn limits the number of records that can be systematically disclosed every year given the need for item-level review by member states.

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<sup>1</sup> NATO, "Sharing NATO secrets with the world," YouTube Video, 4:18, March 6, 2015, accessed January 6, 2020. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21ib5LN\\_L4w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21ib5LN_L4w)

## 1. Institutional Context

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded in 1949 to ensure the collective defence of its member states in Europe and North America in the context of the early Cold War. Significantly, it is both a military and political alliance. While initially intended as a deterrent against Soviet aggression in western Europe, the alliance has evolved over the decades and now aims to “prevent crises, manage conflicts and stabilize post-conflict situations” to ensure the collective security of the citizens of its member states.<sup>2</sup> Originally composed of twelve members, it has since grown to 29 as of February 2020, having undergone multiple rounds of enlargement particularly after the end of the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> NATO is therefore a crucial part of the “collective historical heritage of over 900 million citizens”, and by its extension its documentary record is of great interest to those citizens who have, and continue, to enjoy the alliance’s protection.<sup>4</sup>

The *North Atlantic Treaty*, also referred to as the Washington Treaty, is NATO’s founding document and lays out the principles of the alliance. NATO can be classified as a “democratic security community.”<sup>5</sup> These dual components are expressed in Articles 2, 5 and the treaty’s preamble. Article 5, the foundation of NATO’s doctrine of collective defence, states that “an armed attack against one or more [member states] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.”<sup>6</sup> The preamble of the treaty enshrines the

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<sup>2</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, (NATO Summit, Lisbon, 19-20 November 2010): 4.

<sup>3</sup> North Macedonia in the process to becoming the 30<sup>th</sup> member of the alliance. The authority to invite new nations to join the alliance is vested in the North Atlantic Council as established under Article 10 of the NAT, which states that: “The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty”. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *North Atlantic Treaty*, Washington, United States, 1949; NATO, “NATO Allies sign Accession Protocol for the future Republic of North Macedonia,” NATO, February 6, 2019, accessed November 15, 2020. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_163078.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_163078.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Roche, “From top secret to publicly disclosed: engaging with NATO’s declassified records,” *Comma* 8, no. 2 (2015): 55.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen Hallams, “NATO at 60: Going Global?,” *International Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 2, NATO at 60 (Spring, 2009): 424.

<sup>6</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *North Atlantic Treaty*, Washington, United States, 1949.

philosophical aims of the alliance, principally that:

[The Alliance members] are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Article 2 states that the member states will “contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions.”<sup>8</sup>

The highest decision making body is the North Atlantic Council (NAC). Importantly, it is the only committee explicitly mentioned in the *North Atlantic Treaty*. Article 9 states that:

The Parties hereby establish a Council, on which each of them shall be represented, to consider matters concerning the implementation of this Treaty. The Council shall be so organised as to be able to meet promptly at any time. The Council shall set up such subsidiary bodies as may be necessary...<sup>9</sup>

The Council is composed of permanent representatives, usually at the rank of ambassador, who meet on a weekly basis (or as necessary) to discuss issues relevant to the alliance. Importantly, the Council can also meet at the level of Ministers (usually Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence), Chiefs of Staff, or Heads of States. As the mandate of the NAC is vast, authority is delegated to subordinate committees who have specialized knowledge and are therefore empowered to make decisions on behalf of the NAC. These subordinate committees are themselves composed of representatives of each member state (in theory), though in practice representation is usually limited to larger delegations such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany. Additionally, these sub-committees are composed of members of the international staff or international military staff who have relevant expertise (see Appendix II: Figure 3.1 for an overview of NATO’s political and

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<sup>7</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *North Atlantic Treaty*, Washington, United States, 1949.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

military structure). For our purposes of this study, I will focus on the role of the Archives Committee (AC/324).<sup>10</sup>

Decisions at the North Atlantic Council are based on consensus; all members of the alliance must agree on a course of action that then becomes the collective will of the alliance. While this may seem to be a recipe for indecision, Peter Schneider argues that consensus is at the heart of the alliance's success, noting that: "NATO has always been a team. Its huge experiences in cooperation, its organized mechanism to build consent, and its foundation on trust are the factors the member-states benefit from."<sup>11</sup> The organized mechanism for consensus takes the form of the silence procedure. Nations are assumed to agree until they object or raise concerns regarding a specific policy, what is known as breaking silence. One of the primary responsibilities of the Secretary-General is to facilitate consensus amongst the alliance members. Consensus is time-consuming to construct, and can often take years to reach depending how controversial the issue at hand or how often the committee in question meets. Yet, the primary advantage of consensus-based governance is the strength of the policy that is produced and the ability of other bodies (including the NATO Archives) to use these collective policies to their fullest extent. This framework is important to note since "consensus is applied at every committee level, which implies that all NATO decisions are collective decisions made by its member countries," including the Archives Committee.<sup>12</sup>

The Archives Committee was established in 1999. Its purpose is to:

Assist and advise the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on all archives and records-related matters to ensure the preservation of and public access to information of permanent value held in the NATO Archives.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "North Atlantic Council", 10 October 2017. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_49763.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49763.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Peter Schneider, "The Evolution of NATO: The Alliance's Strategic Concept and its Predecessors, 1945-2000" (Naval Postgraduate School, Master's Thesis, 2000): 111

<sup>12</sup> "Consensus decision-making at NATO," NATO, 14 March 14, 2016, accessed December 4, 2020. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_49178.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49178.htm)

<sup>13</sup> NATO, "Archives Committee", 7 April 2016. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_69340.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69340.htm)

It achieves these objectives by enforcing and modifying the NATO Records Policy, ensuring allied members remain aware of the importance of the proper management of NATO records and the requirements to achieve this, and reporting to the Council through its annual report on the status of the organization's efforts to manage, preserve, and disclose NATO records; and to recommend amendments to existing policies or propose new procedures as required.<sup>14</sup> All NATO countries are represented at the meetings either by members of Delegations, senior officials or senior national archivists. It is chaired by the NATO Archivist and usually meets twice a year. Crucially, the Archives Committee reports directly to the North Atlantic Council, ensuring direct access, when necessary, to the alliance's highest decision making body (see Appendix II: Figure 3.2). It is important to note that the NATO Archives is subordinate to the Archives Committee. The Archives Committee is also a unique institution relative to other international organizations; to my knowledge no other IGO has an archival and records management authority separate from its existing organizational hierarchy.

The NATO Archives is the official repository for all records created by NATO and its entities, including commands, research centres, and field operations. It is composed of two units, Acquisitions and Holdings Management Unit and Public Disclosure, and is headed by the NATO Archivist. Structurally, the NATO Archives are imbedded within the International Staff (IS) in the Division of Executive Management.<sup>15</sup> The NATO Archivist, on behalf of the Archives Committee, is responsible for the proper management and preservation of NATO records, coordinating with and advising other NATO bodies on proper records management procedures, raising awareness of the importance of NATO records, developing and implementing records management policies, and recommending to the Archives Committee

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<sup>14</sup> NATO, North Atlantic Council, "NATO Records Policy", C-M(2011)0043.

<sup>15</sup> "NATO Organization: Structure," NATO, December 12, 2019, accessed January 11, 2020. <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/structure.htm>

records of historical value for declassification and public disclosure on a systematic and ad-hoc basis.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. A Brief History of Public Disclosure

Over the course of its history, NATO has evolved its definition of transparency to encompass not merely the disclosure of financial records and press statements, but the annual disclosure and declassification of access to records and its relationship to transparency. The current Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, explicitly connects the declassification and disclosure of NATO's historical records through the activities of its archives as essential pillars of NATO's strategy to become more transparent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. NATO's most recent annual report makes this connection even clearer, stating that:

[The NATO Archives] promote transparency by enabling access to NATO information via a public disclosure programme. Forty thousand boxes of material are held in the Archives, with an annual increase of around 100,000 records.<sup>17</sup>

NATO recognized the value early in its history of leveraging its internal documentation to enhance its transparency and accountability to both member states and their citizens. Linda Risso argues that given the level of public skepticism about the value of the alliance in most member states, “[p]ublic support for NATO had therefore to be strengthened through a series of information programmes put forward by the national governments and by NATO itself.”<sup>18</sup> Transparency, however, in the early days of the alliance, did not mean access to NATO records. Rather, it was framed as access to information as disseminated to the media through internal departments, such as the NATO Information Service, or to the public

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<sup>16</sup> NATO, North Atlantic Council, “NATO Records Policy”, C-M(2011)0043; NATO, North Atlantic Council, “Primary Directive on Information Management”, C-M(2008)0113(INV).

<sup>17</sup> The figure of 100,000 relates to the average annual increase in the archival holdings, not necessarily to number of records which are publically disclosed. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The Secretary General's Annual Report 2018*. Brussels: NATO, 2019): 114.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Risso, “Propaganda on wheels: The NATO travelling exhibitions in the 1950s and 1960s,” *Cold War History* 11, no. 1 (2011): 20.

directly through travelling exhibitions.<sup>19</sup>

The initial campaigns for declassifications in the 1970s were prompted primarily by concerns over space management. From 1949 to 1997 the Central Registry accumulated 4,500 linear meters of subject files recording the activities of the Organization and some 3,700 microfilms containing all printed NATO documents generated by the North Atlantic Council and its subsidiary bodies.<sup>20</sup> Between 1973 and 1981, 37,000 documents had been downgraded or declassified from NATO's Central Registry, covering the early years of the alliance up to 1961. While these early initiatives did not make these records publically accessible, they would later form the basis of the NATO Archive's initial public disclosure program in the early 2000s as well as the NATO Online portal. However, the emphasis was on space management and reducing the security burden on individual record units for managing their burgeoning collections. This initial program of declassification was halted in 1981 when the principal of the silence procedure was removed and replaced by a system of unanimous consent. The result was that no documents were declassified for over a decade until the public disclosure program was resumed in 1995 in preparation for the formal opening of an archival service.<sup>21</sup>

During the 1980s, external researchers hoping to gain access to unclassified information "needed the support of their national delegation and the direct approval of NATO's Secretary-General."<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, this is essentially the current policy at the IAEA Archives for access to any classified documents or unclassified information older than 30 years. In practice, this ensured that only a limited number of individual documents were released at a time, depending upon the persistence of the researcher, the urgency of the request, and the level of support from individual members of national delegations. That is not

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<sup>19</sup> Today, the Division of Public Diplomacy. Risso. "Propaganda on wheels," 9.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, *Guide to Archives of Intergovernmental Organizations*. (Paris: UNESCO, April 1999): 186.

<sup>21</sup> Roche, "From top secret to publicly disclosed," 57.

<sup>22</sup> Roche, "From top secret to publicly disclosed," 57.



to say that no efforts were made during this decade to restart the declassification program. In 1984, the issue was debated by the North Atlantic Council, although it was ultimately rejected.<sup>23</sup> Lawrence Kaplan argues that the lack of value attached to NATO's institutional records explains the prolonged process in establishing a proper public disclosure program through an institutionalized archive:

It is tempting to speculate that the ministers were concerned about breaches of security or embarrassing disclosures. More likely, the opening of the records was simply not important enough for busy officials to give the time needed for the enterprise.<sup>24</sup>

However, Gjert Dyndal takes a more negative interpretation and argues political calculation, rather than inertia, was the main reason for the lack of public disclosure during this period.

He observes that:

The NATO organisation is complicated, and in principle all declassification and disclosure of documents has to go through all nations for approval. As many nations held firmly on to the NATO structures and forces well into the 1990s – and as many feared that the political sensitivity of much of the archives would still have political implications – hardly anything was released until the end of the 1990s.<sup>25</sup>

By the late 1980s, pressure from national archivists and an internal drive to improve transparency saw the hiring of two archival consultants in 1989, F. Péquin and E.A. Thompson, who were tasked with producing a report reviewing the state of NATO's historical records in 1989.<sup>26</sup> The report, finished in 1992 with an addendum finished in 1994, produced the first complete inventory of NATO's records and formed the basis for the first selection of publically available documents released later in the decade. Additionally, beginning in 1993, the alliance began to make documentation and publications on political, military, economic and scientific matters, including communiques and official statements, press releases, speeches, newsletters (such as the NATO Review) and reference material

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<sup>23</sup> Lawrence S. Kaplan "The Development of the NATO Archives," *Cold War History* 3, no. 3 (2003): 103

<sup>24</sup> Kaplan "The Development of the NATO Archives," 103.

<sup>25</sup> Gjert Lage Dyndal, "How the High North became Central in NATO Strategy: Revelations from the NATO Archives," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34, no. 4 (2011): 561.

<sup>26</sup> Roche, "From top secret to publicly disclosed," 57.

available through the NATO Integrated Data Service. The database also included limited amounts of documentation from NATO's military command headquarters, such as Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), and other NATO agencies.<sup>27</sup>

The NATO Archives were officially established in 1999, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the alliance, allowing external researchers access to NATO's official records en-mass for the first time.<sup>28</sup> Its opening marked a new era in NATO's conception of transparency. Prior to the opening of the NATO Archives, Kaplan argues that "The lack of access to the records of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization inhibited scholarly research into its role in American foreign relations, in the evolution of the Cold War, and in the movement towards European unity."<sup>29</sup> It is likely no coincidence that an institutional archive was only opened on the alliance's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In the context of the end of the Cold War military threat from the Soviet Union, NATO lost one of its principle *raison d'être*. Additionally, the alliance embarked on large scale military operations in the Balkans for the first time in its history and began a two decades long process of enlargement into eastern Europe, increasing the level of scrutiny and criticism. The need, therefore, to become more transparent and accountable to the citizens of member states by granting access to NATO records on-site and professionalizing its information management policies was part of a larger campaign whereby the alliance attempted to reshape its mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

While records were always managed within the organization under a registry system, it was only with the establishment of the archives that systematic, public access was granted. Since 1999, the NATO Archives has declassified over 330,000 documents, with an average of 5,000-10,000 new documents reviewed and released every year through systematic and ad-

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<sup>27</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, *Guide to Archives of Intergovernmental Organizations*. (Paris: UNESCO, April 1999): 186.

<sup>28</sup> Dyndal, "Revelations from the NATO Archives," 561.

<sup>29</sup> Kaplan, "The Development of the NATO Archives," 103.

hoc requests.<sup>30</sup> Academic researchers, on the whole, have responded positively to establishment of the NATO Archives, and access to official documentation is gradually producing an “archival stage” in the academic analysis of the alliance.<sup>31</sup> Kaplan notes that, “Although the records are not complete, [NATO records] cast light on key problems of the 1960s. As the Cold War recedes into the past, member nations have quickened the pace of declassification of documents relating to the alliance.”<sup>32</sup> Andreas Wenger observes that “studies on the history of NATO require multinational and multi-archival research,” highlighting the potential intergovernmental archives can provide in enriching our discourse on international affairs, diplomacy, and military affairs during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup>

### 3. Policy Framework

NATO has an extensive policy framework concerning information and records management in general, and declassification and public disclosure in particular. Most are accessible on the Alliance’s website in different portals (such as the NATO Archives webpage), allowing the public to understand in detail what is and is not disclosed, and the reasons why certain categories of records remain classified. Of interest for external researchers are the procedures governing access to records held at the NATO Archives in the “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information”.

NATO records are categorized in classified or non-classified categories. There are four categories of classified information: NATO Restricted (NR), NATO Classified (NC), NATO Secret (NS), and Cosmic Top Secret (CTS). There are two categories of non-classified information: Releasable to the Public and Unclassified (NU). Each is summarized

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<sup>30</sup> Figures as of 2016. Roche, “From top secret to publicly disclosed,” 57.

<sup>31</sup> Nesmith, “Toward the Archival Stage in the History of Knowledge,” 145.

<sup>32</sup> Lawrence Kaplan, “Preface”, in Andreas Wenger, Christian Nuenlist, and Anna Locher, eds. *Transforming NATO in the Cold War: Challenges beyond Deterrence in the 1960s*. (New York: Routledge, 2006): x.

<sup>33</sup> Andreas Wenger, Christian Nuenlist, and Anna Locher, “New Perspectives on NATO History”, in Andreas Wenger, Christian Nuenlist, and Anna Locher, eds. *Transforming NATO in the Cold War: Challenges beyond Deterrence in the 1960s*. (New York: Routledge, 2006): 5.

in the tables below. Security classifications are determined by the creator and only the originator or an inheriting authority can change a security marking.

Table 3.1: NATO Classified Information Classifications<sup>34</sup>

Cosmic Top Secret (CTS) <sup>35</sup>	Unauthorized disclosure of information would cause exceptionally grave damage to NATO. Information is accountable.
NATO Secret (NS)	Unauthorized disclosure would cause serious damage to NATO. Information is accountable.
NATO Classified (NC)	Unauthorized disclosure would be damaging to NATO's interests.
NATO Restricted (NR)	Unauthorized disclosure would be disadvantageous to NATO's interests.

Table 3.2: NATO Non-Classified Information<sup>36</sup>

NATO Unclassified (NU)	Official information that is property of NATO, does not meet classification criteria, and is permitted to be accessed by non-NATO entities when such access is deemed not to be detrimental to NATO.
Releasable to the Public	Information can be released to the public immediately and poses no threat under any circumstances to NATO.

The broad outlines of NATO's information management strategy are outlined in the "NATO Information Management Policy" C-M(2007)0118. It identifies three primary objectives: First, information superiority<sup>37</sup>; second, effective and efficient use of information; third, identification and preservation of information of permanent value. Additionally, the NIMP framework for access to information balances the responsibility to share with the need-

<sup>34</sup> NATO, North Atlantic Council, "Security within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization", C-M(2002)49.

<sup>35</sup> Formerly: Top Secret.

<sup>36</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, "The Management of Non-Classified NATO Information", C-M(2002)60.

<sup>37</sup> NATO defines information superiority as the, "State of relative advantage in the information domain achieved by getting the right information to the right people at the right time in the right form whilst denying an adversary the ability to do the same". NATO, Archives Committee, "Primary Directive on Information Management", C-M(2008)0113(INV) Annex 1.

to-know. Responsibility-to-Share is the principle whereby individual or collective entities have an “obligation to make information available, discoverable and accessible for those entities that require the information to perform their official tasks and services.”<sup>38</sup> Need to know is defined as “[t]he principle according to which a positive determination is made that a prospective recipient has a requirement for access to, knowledge of, or possession of information in order to perform official tasks or services.”<sup>39</sup>

NATO’s policies regarding declassification and public disclosure are outlined in two documents: “Public Disclosure of NATO Information” (C-M(2008)0116-REV1) and the “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information” (AC/324-D(2014)0010-REV2 ). These policies establish a framework explicitly connected with NATO’s larger objective to enhance its transparency, noting that, “NATO recognises that transparency is key to creating a public climate of support and understanding for the Alliance’s missions and accomplishments”.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the policies make explicit reference to the democratic values of the alliance as *the* raison d’être for public disclosure:

In keeping with the democratic principles that there is a clear duty to inform the public, and as an expression of the importance of the common historical and cultural values that tie members of the Alliance indivisibly together, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will disclose to the public NATO information when such information is no longer classified or sensitive.<sup>41</sup>

NATO aims to fulfill three objectives through the disclosure and declassification of NATO records: first, to inform the public and broaden understanding about NATO; second, to stimulate discussion about NATO; and third, to facilitate research about NATO.<sup>42</sup>

Information may be disclosed at the request of a member nation, in response to a request

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<sup>38</sup> For an overview of NATO’s information management policy framework, see Appendix 2: Figure 3.3. NATO, North Atlantic Council, “NATO Information Management Policy”, C -M(2007)0118.

<sup>39</sup> NATO, North Atlantic Council, “NATO Information Management Policy”, C -M(2007)0118.

<sup>40</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, “Primary Directive on Information Management”, C-M(2008)0113(INV).

<sup>41</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, “Public Disclosure of NATO Information”, C-M(2008)0116-REV1.

<sup>42</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information”, AC/324-D(2014)0010-REV2.

from the public, or to support a specific NATO activity or policy. Only member states, through their permanent delegations and representation on the Archives Committee, have the right to declassify or disclose a document. There are two processes whereby NATO discloses information to the public, systematic and ad-hoc. Each requires a distinct procedure and are therefore detailed separately in the following sections.

### **Systematic Requests**

The procedure for systematic requests for declassification and public disclosure are outlined in Annex 2 of the “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information.” In general, information that is at least 30 years old and deemed to be of permanent value can be proposed to the Archives Committee by the NATO Archivist. If a record is marked NATO Unclassified, the information can be automatically disclosed on January 1 of the following year. If a record is marked NATO Restricted, it is proposed for declassification over a twelve-month period and thereafter can be publically disclosed as a NATO Unclassified record following the same procedure detailed above. Information marked NATO Confidential, NATO Secret and Cosmic Top Secret can also be proposed for declassification, although there is no timeline for how long the process of declassification can take. An exception to this framework are records related to the nuclear planning process, that are processed after a minimum of 50 years. Only the originator, successor organization or higher authority (such as the North Atlantic Council) can authorize the removal of a security classification.<sup>43</sup>

Records proposed for declassification and disclosure are forwarded to both the Archives Committee and delegations of member states that have equity in the information. It is important to note that only nations that were members at the time a document was created

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<sup>43</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information”, AC/324-D(2014)0010-REV2; NATO, Archives Committee, “NATO Information Manual”, AC/324-D(2013)001.

have the right to review that record for public disclosure or declassification. As in the North Atlantic Council and the Archives Committee, the review by national delegations is conducted under the silence procedure. Nations have the right to withhold authorization for disclosure (i.e. break silence) for documents marked NATO Confidential, Secret and Cosmic Top Secret by invoking one of ten exemptions outlined in Annex 1 of the “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information” (see Table 3.3 below). If information is withheld, nations must provide the NATO Archives with the “same justifications as required under the nation’s Freedom of Information or Access to Information legislation or policy.”<sup>44</sup> The NATO Archivist may also indicate when a withheld record can be proposed for review again, though this is not a requirement. After the completion of the systematic review period, a Public Disclosure Notice (PDN) is circulated to all NATO civilian and military bodies, in addition to the Archives Committee and national delegations.<sup>45</sup>

Table 3.3: NATO Exemptions for the Public Disclosure of Information<sup>46</sup>

NATO 1	Information, the public disclosure of which would be likely endanger NATO internal cohesion, members, missions, infrastructure or personnel
NATO 2	Sensitive personal information about individuals born less than one hundred before the date on which the information was screened
NATO 3	Confidential commercial information
NATO 4	Methods or sources of intelligence
NATO 5	Weapons of mass destruction
NATO 6	Cryptographic systems
NATO 7	Current weapons systems
NATO 8	Current military, political plans, policies, and operations
NATO 9	Internal or external NATO political discussions and sensitivities
NATO 10	Current physical or information security

<sup>44</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information”, AC/324-D(2014)0010-REV2.

<sup>45</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information”, AC/324-D(2014)0010-REV2,

<sup>46</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information”, AC/324-D(2014)0010-REV2.

## Ad-Hoc Requests

Ad-Hoc requests function as the equivalent of national Freedom of Information Requests. The process is outlined in the “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information” Annex 3. Only ad hoc requests submitted by competent authorities of NATO, nations or international organisations having formal relations with NATO shall be considered. Members of the public are entitled to submit an ad-hoc request only with the sponsorship of a national delegation and approval of the NATO Archivist. Originators may also screen current NATO information that supports agreed Alliance transparency goals and propose it for public disclosure. In this process, the NATO Archives plays a coordinating role between the requestor, the originating NATO civilian or military body, and the permanent representatives of the member state. The NATO Archivist does an initial screening of the requested information, taking into account the NATO exemptions outlined above. Nations and originators have the right to screen this information, and may choose to disclose or partially disclose documents. Where partial disclosure is the recommended action, nations and originators make the determination over necessary redactions and inform the NATO Archives accordingly.<sup>47</sup>

The NATO Archivist is also empowered to propose the declassification and public disclosure of subject files on behalf of the NATO Archives.<sup>48</sup> It is important to note that subject files can only be disclosed through the ad-hoc process on the recommendation of the NATO Archivist. These records are arguably “the most valuable of all NATO files, as they give the entire history of policy and decision making as well as operations of the alliance.”<sup>49</sup> Recommendations are submitted to the Archives Committee under a three-month silence

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<sup>47</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information”, AC/324-D(2014)0010-REV2.

<sup>48</sup> Subject files consist of a collection of individual information items related to a common subject, office, or administrative process. They are managed under a single identifier. NATO, Archives Committee, “Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information”, AC/324-D(2014)0010-REV2.

<sup>49</sup> Kaplan, “The Development of the NATO Archives,” 106.



procedure. Subject files can be proposed for disclosure if: there is a strong research interest in a particular theme where the sensitivity of the information is minimal; related information already is publicly disclosed by NATO or a member nation; the age of the information is sufficient to minimize its risk to current NATO operations or policies.<sup>50</sup>

### **Reading Room**

Once a record has been publically disclosed it becomes accessible in the archives reading room at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels. Access to the reading room is governed by the Reading Room Protocol. Given that NATO is an active military headquarters, the process to gain access to the archives can be daunting to novice researchers. Researchers must submit a request form to the Public Disclosure Unit at the NATO Archives that takes a minimum of ten business days to process (compared to roughly a month at the IAEA). External visitors must also specify the timeframe they wish to visit the headquarters; once this is agreed access is limited to this period and cannot be extended. The restrictions inside the reading room are less cumbersome. Visitors can bring photographic equipment and download records as PDFs.<sup>51</sup>

### **Limitations of NATO's Access Policies**

NATO is a risk-averse institution when it comes to information management and its consensus-based governance structure inhibits fast review of documentation. Given the security limitations outlined in the previous section, disclosure and declassification must be undertaken at the item level to allow delegations the opportunity to screen each document for potential security violations at the level of NATO Confidential, Secret and Cosmic Top Secret. Even records marked Unclassified and Restricted must still be identified and a list

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<sup>50</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, "Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information", AC/324-D(2014)0010-REV2.

<sup>51</sup> NATO, "General provision governing public access to the NATO Archives Reading Room," accessed May 2, 2019. <https://www.nato.int/archives/Reading-Room-Info.pdf>

forwarded to the Archives Committee for their notification.<sup>52</sup> While this limits the amount of documentation that can reasonably be disclosed, it is for the time being the only mechanism to assuage the fears around security leaks of allied member states. It is important to note that to neglect the security concerns of member states would violate the mandate of the archives and damage its reputation as a trusted custodian of the alliance's memory. Additionally, failure to follow proper security procedures would hinder the willingness of certain divisions to transfer their records into the archive's custody, further limiting the value of its disclosure program.

Given the intergovernmental nature of the alliance, the NATO Archives is first and foremost responsible to the delegations (and by extension home governments) of NATO's 29 member countries, rather than their citizens directly. In theory, the legitimacy gap for the alliance is minimized given that membership in the alliance is theoretically based on the shared values of democracy, individual liberty and rule of law as articulated in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. However, one must be careful not to push this argument too far. Historically, NATO has tolerated and even welcomed the membership of authoritarian regimes, most notably Portugal under the authoritarian rule of Salazar and Greece during the period of its military dictatorship from 1967 to 1974. Waterman, Zagorcheva, and Reiter offer a damning indictment of NATO's claims of being the world's most successful democratic alliance, concluding that, "NATO failed to spread or consolidate democracy, most clearly in Greece, Portugal, and Turkey."<sup>53</sup> Nor is this a challenge that is confined to the Cold War. According to Freedom House's 2019 annual report, three member states are currently classified as Partly Free (Albania, Hungary, and Montenegro) while another, Turkey, is

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<sup>52</sup> NATO, Archives Committee, "Directive on the Public Disclosure of NATO Information", AC/324-D(2014)0010-REV2.

<sup>53</sup> Harvey Waterman, Dessie Zagorcheva, and Dan Reiter, "NATO and Democracy", *International Security* Vol. 26, No. 3 (2002): 234.

classified as Not Free.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, eight member states declined in terms of their average scores on political rights and civil liberties in comparison to the previous year.<sup>55</sup> While these metrics can be debated, the optics for the alliance are less than encouraging; nor does it bode well for NATO's objective to appear more transparent to the global community. As Celeste Wallander succinctly observes, NATO's "most serious problem...is the breakdown of liberal democracy within the alliance itself."<sup>56</sup>

Since it is impractical for members of 29 national delegations to review documents in person in the Archives reading room, records selected to be reviewed for disclosure must be scanned and circulated to each delegation. An additional burden is the requirement to notify and receive approval for declassification from the originator(s). This is time consuming for both the delegations and the NATO Archives, and in practice limits the number of records that can be disclosed in any given year (average 5,000 to 15,000). Additionally, it should be noted that given the discrepancy in the staff levels between the permanent missions of the 29 alliance members, not every nation exercises its right to systematically review documents item by item. The result is that larger delegations, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, wield a disproportionate influence in the process.

The extent to which item level review and disclosure is sustainable, let alone desirable, is questionable. While to date the NATO Archives have proposed records for disclosure almost exclusively from the Cold War era, the coming decades will see the forthcoming disclosure of masses of operational records beginning with NATO's first military interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s. The advent of born-digital records during this era, and from the operations in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq, are also a looming challenge that the NATO Archives and Archives Committee will

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<sup>54</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World, 2019: Democracy in Retreat* (Washington: Freedom House, 2019): 14. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019\\_FH\\_FITW\\_2019\\_Report\\_ForWeb-compressed.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019_FH_FITW_2019_Report_ForWeb-compressed.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>56</sup> Celeste A. Wallander, "NATO's Enemies Within: How Democratic Decline Could Destroy the Alliance," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 4 (July/August 2018): 70.

have to grapple with. Options to tackle this increased workload include member states waiving their equity or interest for certain record groups or classifications of records, in effect renouncing their right of systematic item-level review. This has the potential to speed up declassification and disclosure timelines for pre-selected of record series. However, this strategy raises its own challenges. Assuming the 29 member states can reach consensus on topics of historical importance whose records do not need to be systematically reviewed (no small feat!), there is also the question of whether consultations with external stakeholders are necessary. Equally vexing questions include who defines these groups of stakeholders, which external actors are consulted (historians, other academics/researchers, the public, nations, partners, countries in which operations took place, etc.), and how extensive these consultations should be.

Since 1999, NATO has grown from 16 member states to its current 29. The post-Cold War enlargement of the alliance creates both new opportunities and challenges. More member states mean more actors that can propose or sponsor ad-hoc requests, the main mechanism for disclosing subject files. For example, in the spring of 2013 the Hungarian Foreign Ministry submitted an ad hoc request to disclose NATO documents related to the Hungarian uprising in 1956.<sup>57</sup> However, it also means that by the end of the 2030s, significantly more member states will have the right to review and potentially reject documents for declassification and disclosure.

The silence procedure, wherein agreement is assumed until objections are raised by a national representative and silence is broken, is at the heart of the public disclosure program. Given the diverse interests and sensitivities of the 29 member states, assumed consent is the most practical method for systematically declassifying and disclosing records in a timely manner. The opposite, active consent, whereby the Archives Committee would require the

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<sup>57</sup> “NATO discloses documents related to the Hungarian Revolution in 1956,” NATO, August 29, 2013, accessed February 22, 2020. <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/102629.htm>

consent of each nation prior to disclosure, would inhibit a proactive disclosure policy. Delays, higher priorities, and the varying sizes and resources of each delegation would require that the NATO Archives consistently lobby the 29 delegations, wasting limited resources. The silence procedure offers a model that other IGOs, with significantly larger nation-state memberships, can follow. While undoubtedly a larger percentage of individual records would be withheld from disclosure, it would minimize the burden of seeking active consent particularly when multiple nations have equity in a given record.

Despite the limitations outlined above, Nicholas Roche, an archivist in the Public Disclosure Unit in the NATO Archives, argues that NATO has been both proactive and transparent in its disclosure program given the structural limitations the archives operates within. He advocates a non-policy centric approach to enhancing access, including deepening relationships with individual researchers; leveraging prolonged declassification timelines to create richer item and series levels descriptions; and proactively engaging NATO's designated community and external audiences through outreach programming including the development of archival exhibitions and online portals. Outreach is key in this model as it is a means to enhance the alliance's public image and therefore leverage more resources for the archives from the organization. The effectiveness of this strategy will be discussed in the following section.<sup>58</sup>

## **5. Access Beyond Policy**

Richard Cox argues that, "It is really the art of storytelling perhaps that archivists need to be concerned with."<sup>59</sup> While a robust policy framework is essential for an effective declassification and disclosure program, the ability to share NATO's narrative outside of its designated community (i.e. internal staff), is a pre-requisite for the wider public to be aware

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<sup>58</sup> Roche, "From top secret to publicly disclosed," 64-65.

<sup>59</sup> Richard J. Cox, "Revisiting the Archival Finding Aid," *Journal of Archival Organization* 5, no. 4 (2008): 27.

of the collections' existence and how to properly access it. To this end, NATO's archival exhibition program and online platform play an essential role of spreading awareness of the collection and enticing researchers to visit the Archives reading room. Additionally, they act as a mechanism to showcase the value of the NATO Archives within the organization itself, to connect its work with NATO's transparency objectives, and ultimately to secure more influence and resources to implement the public disclosure program.

### **Archival Exhibitions**

Over the past decade, the NATO Archives has hosted multiple archival exhibitions. These exhibitions correspond with anniversaries, such as the accession of a member state to the alliance<sup>60</sup> or of NATO operations<sup>61</sup>, showcase key documents such as the Report on Non-Military Cooperation<sup>62</sup>, or with key events in specific member states, such as the Prague Spring in the Czech and Slovak Republics.<sup>63</sup> Archival exhibits play a pivotal role in the construction and dissemination of corporate memory. Paul Lasewicz argues that:

An organization that can effectively leverage its history... can shape how it is perceived and received by key constituents... To this end, corporate history can serve as a competitive advantage.<sup>64</sup>

In my experience, these exhibitions (especially the openings) are generally well attended and received by NATO staff and national delegations, the latter are usually keen to attend if the exhibit profiles their country. While exhibitions are staged to promote an organization's history and self-image, the challenge is balancing the natural tendency towards celebratory fanfare with a critical perspective on the events being showcased. An exhibition must also

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<sup>60</sup> "60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Accession of Germany to NATO," NATO, June 25, 2015, accessed February 11, 2020. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_121253.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_121253.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>61</sup> "The NATO Archives commemorates the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreements and the IFOR peacekeeping mission," NATO, September 5, 2016, accessed February 1, 2020.

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_126429.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_126429.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>62</sup> "The NATO Archives makes the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Report on Non-Military Cooperation," NATO, January 19, 2017, accessed February 1, 2020. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_140216.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_140216.htm)

<sup>63</sup> "'Czechoslovakia 1968-1969', forty years after," NATO, January 5, 2009, accessed February 1, 2020. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_43631.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_43631.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>64</sup> Paul C. Lasewicz "Forget the Past? Or History Matters? Selected Academic Perspectives on the Strategic Value of Organizational Pasts," *American Archivist* 78, no. 1 (2015): 76.

challenge an organization's own corporate narrative about its past to the greatest extent that is politically advisable. Otherwise, it merely reinforces them.

To illustrate this dynamic, I would like to offer some personal reflections on my experience working on exhibitions at the NATO Archives. When I arrived in March 2019, NATO was in the middle of preparing an array of activities to commemorate its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The NATO Archives, as the custodian of the alliance's records and memory, was no exception. The idea was to create a new visitors' centre to educate visitors, delegations, members of the public, and NATO staff about key moments of the alliance's history using reproductions of original records. I was tasked with developing the concept and script for one of the documents: NATO's founding document, the North Atlantic Treaty. The aim was to produce a roughly four to five-minute video contextualizing the Treaty. In this case, the context was the early Cold War and the development of rival alliance systems led by the United States and the Soviet Union.

NATO's narrative that the alliance was a defensive measure in reaction to Soviet aggrandizement is deeply entrenched in the institution. My experience was that it was extremely difficult to challenge this narrative. In my original draft, I framed the Cold War as an ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union, but stressed that the United States and Western Europe feared the spread of communism. However, it quickly became apparent that this narrative, which I considered to be a measured interpretation of the origins of the Cold War, was politically unacceptable. Here was my first-hand experience of Verne Harris's observation that, "Archivists, whether they realize it or not, are at once the objects and instruments of political pressure."<sup>65</sup> It was necessary to revise the script. The final version read:

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<sup>65</sup> Verne Harris, "The Archive Is Politics," in *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective*, ed. Verne Harris (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007), 242.

In 1948, two major events shook the Western powers: the February coup in Czechoslovakia followed by the Blockade of Berlin later that June. Both of these Soviet-backed aggressions served as alarming evidence of Joseph Stalin's actual intentions.<sup>66</sup>

There are always competing voices within an organization struggling to control its image and the narrative of its past. This is natural and appropriate; no individual or entity should be vested with that singular responsibility. The challenge for the corporate archivist is to fight against the natural tendency within a corporate setting to be solely celebratory. As Anna Robinson-Sweet argues, "The power of the archives, therefore, is its ability to oppose the state's chronology."<sup>67</sup> As archivists, it is our responsibility not only to challenge official chronologies, but to enable outsiders to confront the corporate narratives as fully as possible. In the case of the NATO Archives, this is partially achieved through the addition of exhibition publications, that provide a greater selection of primary sources as well as commentary and analysis to contextualize these documents.<sup>68</sup> These publications are accessible alongside summaries of the exhibitions themselves, and are accessible on the NATO Archives website.

### **NATO Archives Online**

NATO Archives Online is an initiative giving users direct access to individual documents. An implementation of Access to Memory (AtoM), the platform is open source and adheres to international archival standards, including ISAAR (CPF) and ISAD(G).<sup>69</sup> While initially conceptualized to provide access to select records from NATO's first ten years of existence, the collection has gradually grown to encompass more recent periods and

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<sup>66</sup> NATO, "Document Display: North Atlantic Treaty." Archival Exhibition at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Anna Robinson-Sweet, "Truth and Reconciliation: Archivists as Reparations Activists," *American Archivist* Vol. 81, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018): 26.

<sup>68</sup> For example, see: NATO Archives, *60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Report on Non-Military Cooperation*. Brussels, NATO, 2015. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_archives/20170119\\_1755-16-Book.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_archives/20170119_1755-16-Book.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions," NATO, NATO Archives Online, accessed February 20, 2020. <http://archives.nato.int/about>



publications. To date, over 62,000 documents have been added to the online collection, covering the North Atlantic Council and its sub-committees, the Military Committee and its working groups, as well as a selection of NATO Publications.<sup>70</sup>

The strength of NATO Online is that it gives users direct access to publically disclosed documents without them having to physically come to the NATO Headquarters in Brussels. Therefore, it is ideally suited for students or casual researchers who lack the resources to conduct research trips, or who wish to explore aspects of the organization's history without going into too much depth. More generally, it serves as a useful way to publicize the existence of the NATO Archives and the kinds of records that are available for public consultation in its collection.

The disadvantage of this approach is that it is labour intensive and therefore only a small number of records are uploaded to the website every year. Despite limitations in user-knowledge of how to navigate archival finding aids (hierarchical description) online, there are multiple search options through tagged terms, keywords, and Optical Character Recognition (OCR) of scanned PDF-formatted documents, allowing novices to narrow their queries and discover relevant documents. While the site has ample descriptions of NATO committees, one notable absence is the lack of finding aids online, that would give external researchers a greater idea of the scope of the declassified collection.<sup>71</sup> However, a selection of finding aids compiled from the consultants reports in 1992 and 1994 are available on the main page of the Archives website. Another glaring omission is any selection from NATO's audio and visual heritage, though this owes more to existing copyright and custodian arrangements. Copyright remains with the individual photographers in most instances. Additionally, since most of the photographs were commissioned by the Public Diplomacy

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<sup>70</sup> "NATO Archives Online," NATO, accessed February 4, 2020. <http://archives.nato.int>

<sup>71</sup> "NATO Archives: Archival description," NATO, accessed February 4, 2020. <http://archives.nato.int/informationobject/browse>

Division and its predecessors, the Archives must consult them each of these parties prior to publication online. Currently, the films are managed by the Imperial War Museum as NATO lacks the technical expertise or resources to devote to their conservation.<sup>72</sup>

## 6. Compliance with the Tshwane Principles

Like the IAEA, NATO does not endorse or reference the Tshwane Principles. While the alliance does conform to more of the principles than the IAEA overall, its compliance is still mixed. In policy terms, NATO's exemptions for the disclosure of records generally align with Tshwane principle 9. For example, exemption NATO 7 regarding the withholding of information relevant to current weapons systems aligns with principle 9(a)(ii), and likewise NATO 8 which references "current political or military plans" is in agreement with principle 9(a)(i).<sup>73</sup> Additionally, NATO proactively publishes most of its relevant policies on its website and they are generally posted as downloadable PDFs in logical sections.<sup>74</sup> However, some of the higher policy documents, such as the NATO Information Management Policy that provides an overview of NATO's philosophy and framework towards information management, are not available online.

However, there are two points of concern. Exemptions NATO 1 and NATO 9, related to NATO internal alliance cohesion or national sensitivities, are not properly defined and therefore give extensive latitude to interpretation on the part of the organization or member states. The danger is that these exemptions are invoked to prevent the disclosure of information that one or more member states may find to be politically or personally embarrassing, but which unto themselves are not a direct national security threat. Principle

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<sup>72</sup> While the NATO Archives can still use excerpts for its own exhibits or internal publications, batch uploading a series of videos would violate the spirit of the existing custody agreements.

<sup>73</sup> Open Society Foundation, *The Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information*. (2013): 19.

<sup>74</sup> However, PDFs can be problematic in terms of accessibility requirements.

3(c) of the Tshwane Principles is explicit in outlining factors that are irrelevant to the withholding information from public disclosure, including:

Factors that are irrelevant: disclosure could reasonably be expected to (a) cause embarrassment to, or a loss of confidence in, the government or an official, or (b) weaken a political party or ideology.<sup>75</sup>

As the authority to disclose or withhold records rests with the nations themselves through their delegations and representatives on the Archives Committee, the NATO Archives cannot influence these decisions directly. However, the archives can and should impress upon the delegations the responsibility not to withhold consent for disclosure on the grounds of embarrassment through the guise of assertions of national security. Additionally, should these policies be reviewed in the future, it would be constructive to define what constitutes a threat to NATO internal cohesion and establish a timeline whereby such threats would be determined to have been sufficiently mitigated.

The absence of clear declassification timelines for highly classified information means, in practice, that “almost all of the current activities of the organization [can potentially be classified] upon general criteria and the discretion of administrators which makes the system prone to arbitrary classifications.”<sup>76</sup> While this is certainly true, it would not be as severe a constraint if there existed a policy regarding timeframes for the declassification of highly sensitive material. Currently, NATO Restricted records are automatically downgraded to NATO Unclassified after an additional year of review. However, no similar mechanism exists for the highest three security classifications (NC, NS, and CTS). While it is understandable that the alliance would wish to maintain a certain degree of flexibility, the absence of clear timeframes for higher-level declassifications is concerning in that it may guarantee permanent or unnecessarily prolonged secrecy. Furthermore, member nations are not required to publish justifications as to why they refuse

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Yordanova, “The Transparency - Security Dilemma,” 11.

to disclose records aside from indicating which exemption they are enacting.

To illustrate the absurdity of this procedure (or rather its absence), let us return to an earlier example regarding the Hungarian ad-hoc request in 2013.<sup>77</sup> Why was such a request necessary in the first place? It is highly improbable that these records bore any political or military threat sufficient to imperil current NATO operations or the functioning of the alliance, given that the events of the Hungarian Uprising occurred nearly 60 years prior to the request, nearly double the current timeframe for the disclosure of Unclassified and Restricted files. The lack of systematic disclosure in this instance is even more baffling given that the Soviet Union, the principal military threat that NATO faced during the Cold War, has long since ceased to exist.

### **Conclusions**

The NATO Archives, like its IAEA counterpart, must strike a balancing act between assuaging the concerns of member states over the security of information, and academic researchers eager to gain greater access to the organizations records. NATO has a much higher public profile and, arguably, responsibility to the citizens it professes to protect. It also has a much clearer democratic mandate from its founding treaty. Member nations and the organization are keenly aware of the need to enhance NATO's transparency and accountability beyond mere rhetoric. These are all factors that the NATO Archives has leveraged successfully in the past two decades to develop its public disclosure program and accompanying policies.

Structurally, the NATO Archives is at an advantage in that it has a separate governance structure that reports directly to the highest authority in the alliance (the North Atlantic Council) and is composed, in part, by subject-matter experts and practicing

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<sup>77</sup> It should be noted that as Hungary was not a member of NATO in 1956 (in fact it was a member-state of the opposing Soviet-led Warsaw Pact), the Hungarian delegation was not entitled to make a systematic request for declassification and disclosure.

archivists. The archives also have direct access to the national delegations of the 29 member states that are located at NATO headquarters in Brussels. This allows the archives staff greater opportunity to (informally) lobby members of delegations who have the ultimate authority over declassification and disclosure of records. Through its exhibition program, delegations are further encouraged to engage with the archives and NATO records during anniversaries and commemorations, raising the NATO Archives' profile further in a highly bureaucratic and complex organization.

However, if NATO offers a glimpse at the opportunities available for access to corporate records in an intergovernmental context, it also illustrates its limitations. The lack of clear timeframes to downgrade highly classified records is concerning, even more so when one considers that these records are primarily from the Cold War era. Aside from the sheer scale of the operational records that will be eligible for disclosure and declassification in the coming decades, the areas of political sensitivity will be greatly multiplied. Without clear guidelines as to what can reasonably be construed as a threat to allied cohesion, or sufficient public pressure and scrutiny, it is probable that exemptions under categories 1 and 9 will increase at an alarming rate. These challenges are exacerbated by the requirement of item-level review, which is unlikely to be sufficient for the volume of born digital records and arguably has not been sufficient even for the pre-digital era. A more systematic and automated approach for declassification and disclosure for higher classification levels seems sorely needed.

## Appendix II

Figure 3.1: NATO’s Political and Military Structure, 2019 (Partial)<sup>78</sup>

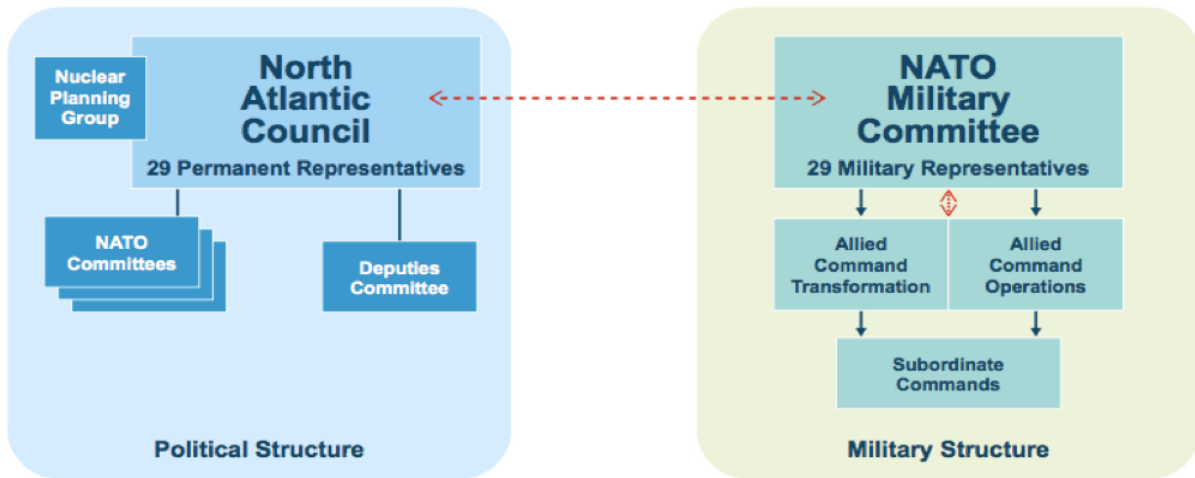
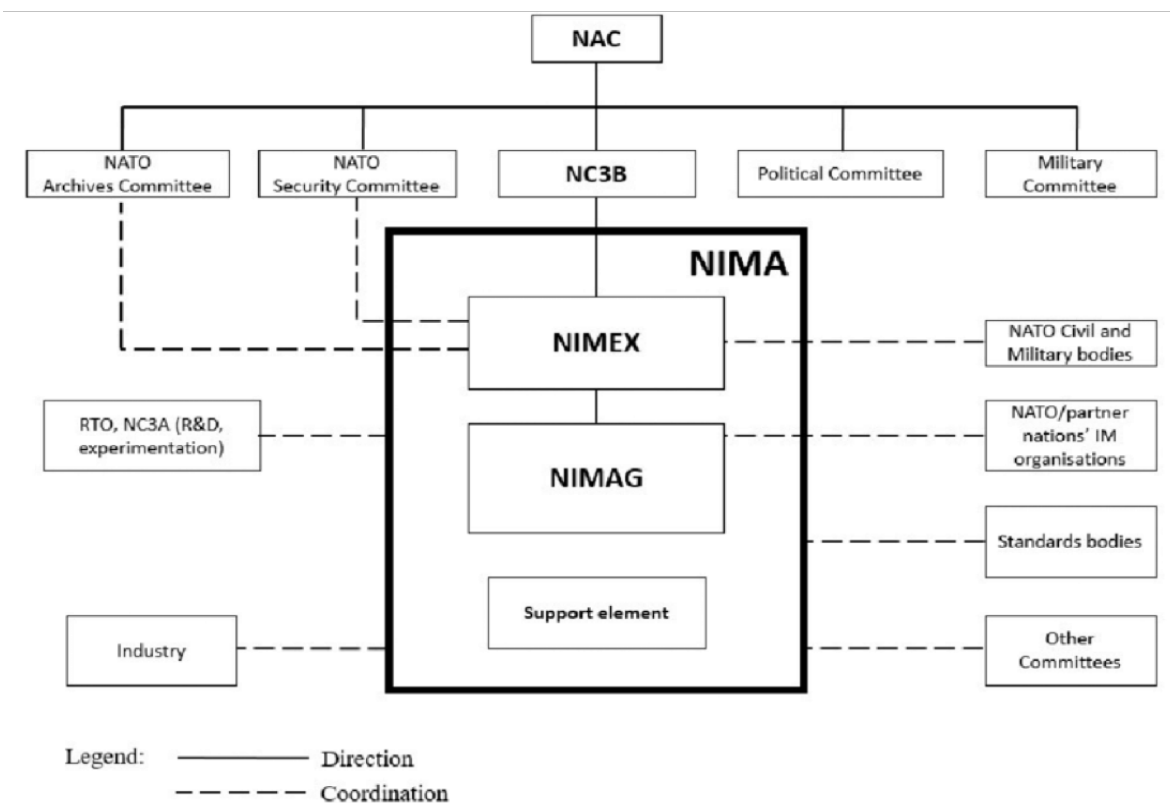


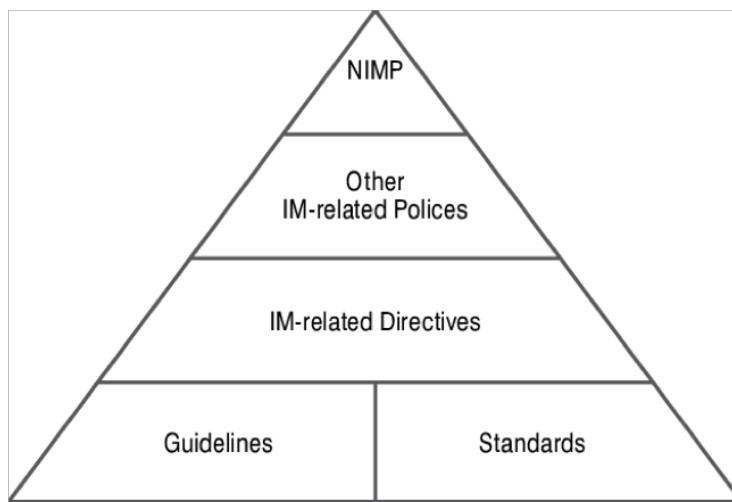
Figure 3.2: The Structure of NATO Information Management Authority<sup>79</sup>



<sup>78</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2018*. Brussels: NATO, 2019): 114.

<sup>79</sup> NATO, North Atlantic Council, “NATO Information Management Policy”, C -M(2007)0118.

Figure 3.3: NATO Framework for Information Management<sup>80</sup>



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<sup>80</sup> NATO, North Atlantic Council, “Primary Directive on Information Management”, C-M(2008)0113(INV): Annex B.

## Conclusions

While archivists in IGOs remain first and foremost corporate archivists, responsible for preserving the institutional memory of the organization whose primary designated community are internal staff and delegations of member states, they cannot neglect the legitimate interest of the member-state citizens. Framing external access in terms of democratic and institutional accountability is an essential obligation for the corporate archivist working in an intergovernmental context. The challenge for archivists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century working in IGOs, such as the IAEA and NATO, will be to manage the growing expectations of an external public for transparency of these institutions through access to corporate records, with the sensitivities of member states and their representatives over the security of information and to safeguard against improper or premature disclosure. Maintaining the trust of the internal staff and member states that the archives are secure repositories is essential for ensuring that records are transferred and preserved prior to their eventual declassification and disclosure. IGO archivists are also grappling with the challenges of providing access to born-digital records, that are both more numerous and pose unique security challenges that were largely absent from the management of their non-digital collections.

It is clear that the NATO Archives are significantly more in line with the Tshwane Principles than the IAEA Archives. While both have an extensive policy framework governing access for their primary designated communities (i.e. internal staff), NATO also possesses a proactive declassification and public disclosure process. The reasons for this discrepancy are primarily structural. IGOs that have an explicit democratic mandate in their principle legal instrument, such as NATO's *North Atlantic Treaty*, provides an explicit democratic mandate that the archives can leverage in the service of declassifying and



disclosing institutional records. By contrast, institutions like IAEA whose mandates do not include references to democratic principles are at significant disadvantage. The *Statute* of the IAEA, provides only vague references to information sharing between member states. It does not explicitly identify as a democratic organization; therefore, broadening the terms of access at the IAEA Archives has been most successful when framed in terms of institutional accountability. However, this is a far less compelling narrative than rooting one's practices in terms of democratic accountability, which would seem to have much more resonance in the realm of external public opinion. Other IGO archives need to examine their institutional mandates carefully to gauge the most effective mechanisms in advocating for more systematic and transparent declassification and disclosure policies.

The NATO Archives also benefits from institutional leadership. Since the opening of the NATO Archives in 1999, the organization has rooted its attempts to increase its institutional and democratic accountability in a narrative that centers on NATO's public disclosure program. This is evidenced in references in NATO's annual reports, in numerous articles on its website, and even in statements by the Secretary-General of the alliance. There is no parallel at the IAEA and this is likely one factor inhibiting a more proactive and systematic disclosure policy for classified records. Other IGO archivists must therefore strive to convince the leadership of organizations, and even the representatives of member states, of the benefits of increased public disclosure for institutional transparency. Without such leadership, the barriers to providing greater internal and external access to records held in IGO archives will remain difficult to overcome.

Finally, the NATO Archives has an independent governance structure in the form of the Archives Committee. It reports directly to the North Atlantic Council, NATO's highest authority. Although consensus can be time consuming to reach, when the Archives Committee does recommend a policy or practice it is much more likely to be adopted given

this direct access. Additionally, the recommendations of the committee have greater authority at the North Atlantic Council given that it is composed not only of representatives of member states, but also subject-matter experts and national archivists. Finally, staff at the NATO Archives benefit greatly from this regular forum whereby best-practices can be shared from the experiences of 29 national archives. IGO Archives in general would benefit significantly from a separate governance structure outside of their bureaucratic hierarchies. It would allow IGO archivists to access professional expertise outside of their immediate corporate environment, and provide a direct means to lobby the highest decision-making bodies.

The records of IGOs held in institutional archives are evidence not only of the day-to-day activities of these organizations, but also the role they play in global governance and international relations. Given that IGOs are institutions founded by and managed for the interest of multiple nation states, they are their inherently transnational. Their records, therefore, offer an alternative perspective to the national narratives of each individual member state. Access to IGO archives have the potential to transform our understanding of the role of individual IGOs in the conduct of international relations and the influence of nation states in their operations. More importantly, external access to IGO records in corporate archives is essential to ensuring these institutions remain accountable and transparent, not only to the governments or their member states, but also to their respective citizens.

I have posited that the Tshwane Principles provide a framework for managing the interests of national security and the right to information. These Principles shift the burden for clearly justifying the refusal to disclose information onto the institution and archives in question. They acknowledge the legitimate right of public bodies to withhold access to information on the basis of national security, but only if it is based on clearly defined threats, is publically explained, and if there are clear timelines to provide access once threat levels

have subsided. The Tshwane Principles also situate transparency as spectrum of practices, each essential to reinforcing institutional and democratic accountability, including: publication of access, declassification, and disclosure policies; clear definitions of what constitutes a legitimate threat to national security; timelines of systematic disclosure; and proper funding of records management and archival institutions to preserve and provide suitable access to an organization's institutional memory. To date, neither institution has explicitly endorsed these Principles. However, both the IAEA and NATO would benefit greatly by explicitly endorsing the Tshwane Principles and aligning their internal and external access policies accordingly. While an official endorsement is unlikely to be forthcoming at either institution, the Tshwane Principles can be a useful self-auditing tool for archivists in IGOs by providing a common framework to gauge the relative openness and transparency of their respective policies and procedures.

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