As formalized research questions, this dissertation asks the following two linked questions: why does alliance cohesion decrease in multilateral politico-military alliances in peacetime even when the alliance itself persists? Alternatively stated, what explains incohesion in multilateral alliances in non-active wartime? I answer in the first part of the dissertation and argue cohesion decreases due to increasing general threat perception. Second, I ask: why does alliance cohesion decrease in face of rising threat? The answer I provide is the heterogeneous perception of this general threat which causes alliance members to disagree on what it means and how to respond.

The collective argument for the answers to the two research questions is what I stylize as “analysis paralysis,” the condition during which an alliance that perceives a rising general threat experiences decreases in cohesion, as member states bicker about what to do.

For the dissertation, I chose to focus on an important and persisting multilateral alliance that provides ample evidence to evaluate my argument. As the dissertation examines a multilateral alliance’s behavior during non-active wartime, I chose the period of the Cold War, and specifically, due to data availability reasons detailed below, the twenty-one years between 1960 and 1980.

To systematically study alliance behavior, the research design employs a multi-method research project of a nested-analysis type following Lieberman’s strategy. I compile my own Alliance Cohesion Dataset of selected NATO proposals through extensive archival research, identify and then code their outcomes. I then run multiple statistical regressions on this Dataset, using alliance-level variables that I develop. Finally, I chose a most-likely case for the analysis paralysis argument, that is, one case of decreasing cohesion at the largest increase in general threat perception, but one with the presence of the highest number of alternate independent variables from within the collected proposals for efficient process tracing of the causal mechanisms. I then draw conclusions from the combination of these methods to answer both research questions.

For the twenty-one years between 1960 and 1980, I collect, identify, and select through original archival research three hundred twenty-five significant proposals that the North Atlantic Council, NATO’s senior-most decision-making body, deliberated and decided on. I code their outcomes into three possible
values: acceptance and thus cohesion, deferral and thus incohesion, and finally national reservation and thus discord. I then operationalize the results of these proposals into yearly alliance cohesion variables. As this is a novel type of operationalization of alliance cohesion, I devise three separate forms alliance cohesion can take as a yearly variable. Each of these three is a composite cohesion score the alliance achieved in a given year, a variable only statistically examined in this dissertation. I conduct three separate multivariate linear regressions. In addition, I also conduct binomial and multinomial logistical regression on all of the cases at the aggregate level, another novel approach to studying cohesion at NATO. The dependent variable of alliance cohesion is operationalized as the outcome of the proposal discussed by the North Atlantic Council, with successful ones demonstrating cohesion and unsuccessful as incohesion.

The second level of analysis proceeds through efficient process-tracing of a single case. The case study proceeds to examine the state-level presence of the proposed alliance-level causal mechanism. I thus explore analysis paralysis and the rise of general threat perception and its effect on a single case, the 1962 proposal to establish a NATO sea-based mixed-manned medium-range Ballistic Missile force, which ultimately resulted in incohesion, as the proposal was continually deferred by the NAC and the follow-on project of the MLF, the proposed NATO multilateral nuclear force, also failed to be established.

In addition to my own, analysis paralysis hypothesis, which would argue that we should witness a statistically significant decrease in cohesion as general threat perception increases, I test six alternate hypotheses. Thus the second hypothesis is the traditional neorealist one, arguing that increased threat perception would lead to increased cohesion. The third focuses on ideological compatibility and tests whether greater ideological compatibility led to increased cohesion. The fourth focuses on electoral activity, testing the relationship between elections and cohesion. The fifth focuses on legislative governing power, testing whether greater legislative fractionalization corresponded with decreasing cohesion. The sixth tests whether increased superpower attention, U.S. preference as the alliance leader, had a positive effect on cohesion.

I demonstrate through the five statistical models that increasing general threat perception led to decreasing cohesion. The results are statistically significant in four out of five models, at the p>0.1, 0.05, and 0.01 values, respectively. The only other statistically significant correlation is found to be between vetoes and ideological compatibility of an alliance.

In addition, the process tracing case study demonstrated the causal mechanism underlying the causal
link, the heterogeneous threat perception being linked to divergent responses from member states through the detailed analysis of contemporary declassified North Atlantic Council primary documents coupled with secondary sources.

I thus concluded that the argument of analysis paralysis was validated.

Main literature used:


Bennet, Andrew, and Checkel, Jeffrey. Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytical Tool, Cambridge:


Brands, Hal. Non-Proliferation and the Dynamics of the Middle Cold War: The Superpowers, the MLF, and the NPT, Cold War History, 7:3, 389-423, (2007)


Haftendorn, Helga, Coming of Age: German Foreign Policy since 1945 (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).


Hellmann, G and R Wolf Neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, and the future of NATO London: Taylor
& Francis, 1993.


The results of this dissertation are under publication.

This dissertation’s contribution to international relations scholarship are multifold. First, it gathered through intensive archival work thousands of hitherto unanalyzed documents for one of the most studied topics in security studies, NATO. Second, it compiled an original Dataset, the Alliance Cohesion Dataset, that is unique in its application and compilation. Third, it used a novel method to analyze alliance cohesion at a new level of analysis, that of the alliance as an actor. This is the first statistical analysis, specifically three separate inferential models, multivariate linear, multinomial, and binomial regressions, studying alliance cohesion writ large. Fourth, it enhanced our understanding of alliance cohesion conceptually by offering a more refined conceptualization. Fifth and finally, it offered a refined understanding of one of the most studied relationships between alliance cohesion and threat.