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Bringing NATO Home? A comparative analysis on Alliance Cohesion of NATO's out-of-area operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan

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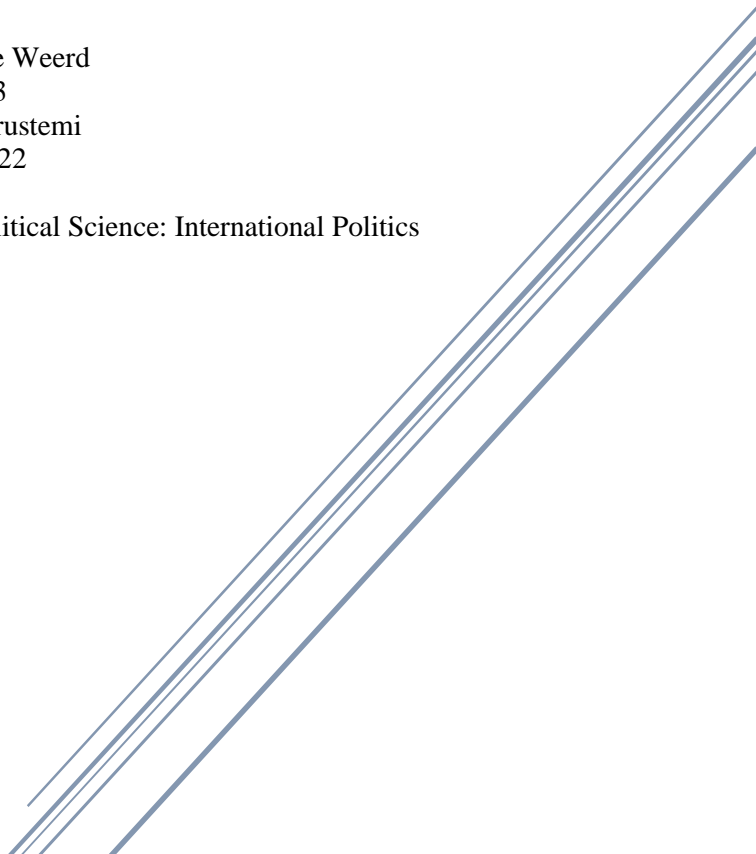
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BRINGING NATO HOME?

A comparative analysis on Alliance Cohesion of NATO's out-of-area operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan

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Abstract

This thesis compares the effects of NATO's out-of-area operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan to analyze what effect geographical distance of operations have on Alliance Cohesion through the method of process tracing. Mainly because of the current geopolitical shift, it is important to evaluate what NATO should look out for policy-wise moving forward. The main variable of analysis in this was the changing threat-perception of the five largest contributors to both operations. The threat-perception was determined by analyzing national security reports and other primary sources from the countries involved in the analysis, focusing on elite-level policy making.

What was found in the comparison was the threat-perceptions of all analyzed states were more aligned in the operations in Kosovo, while the lack of regional/national interests for the analyzed states in Afghanistan made it hard for the states to securitize the operations, damaging Alliance Cohesion. National interests and geopolitical interests were combined in the case of Kosovo, and led to the same end-goal. Meanwhile the operations in Afghanistan led to a larger discrepancy between national interests and geopolitical interests, making Alliance commitment tougher to define, and follow through on.

Index

<u>Introduction</u>	p. 2
<u>Literature Review</u>	p. 3
- NATO's out-of-area operations	p. 3
<u>Theoretical Framework</u>	p. 5
- Alliance Cohesion	p. 6
- Geography in Intervention	p. 8
<u>Methodology</u>	p. 9
- Case Selection	p. 9
- Method of Analysis	p.10
- Method of Source Analysis	p.12
<u>Analysis</u>	p.13
- Kosovo	p. 14
<u>Country Cases</u>	p. 14
<u>Sub conclusion Kosovo</u>	p. 20
- Afghanistan	p. 22
<u>Country Cases</u>	p. 22
<u>Sub conclusion Afghanistan</u>	p. 28
- Kosovo vs. Afghanistan	p. 30
<u>Table 1: Kosovo</u>	p. 31
<u>Table 2: Afghanistan</u>	p. 33
<u>Conclusion</u>	p. 33
<u>Bibliography</u>	p. 34

Introduction

With the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan by NATO troops and its allies, there has been a renewed interest in what the future will be for the Alliance and which operations it should focus on.

After the Cold War, NATO's enlargement to the East and NATO's first external operations in the Balkans was seen as a continuation of its Cold War geopolitical policy of containment of a politically weakened Russia during its 1990's transition. NATO extended its area-of-operations outside of its direct territorial defence and peripheral influence when it intervened in operations like Afghanistan and Iraq. During this time, debates about cohesion within the Alliance flared up as it became harder to rationalize why NATO should be involved in security missions outside of their direct spheres of influence¹.

As of September 2021's departure from Afghanistan, it is an opportune moment to analyse the geopolitical implications of NATO's extended operations compared to operations in its direct periphery and whether this matters for Alliance cohesion, and additionally a more legitimate and credible NATO². This is also important to analyse because currently there is a "Never Again" sentiment towards missions like Afghanistan, but it is unlikely that this will disappear from the Alliance's agenda³. Although Afghanistan was the longest conflict in NATO history, it certainly is not a first of its kind. Kosovo, Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH), Serbia, Iraq and Libya are all examples of where the West and/or the Alliance have attempted to extend their sphere of influence through military goals or humanitarian pursuits. These operations have

¹ I. Kfir (2015), pp. 220-221.

² S. Rynning (2019), p. 51; A. J. Boekestijn & R. de Wijk. Aug. 27, 2021.

³ Kamp, K. H. (2019).

mixed results, leaning towards a reputation for ambiguous success rates. If these did not deter the international community to step in, then it is possible that Afghanistan will not lead to the permanent demise of NATO's operations in their extended periphery.

Literature review

To analyse the distinctive differences between out-of-area operations in NATO's near vicinity and operations in the extended area-of-influence, it is important to first examine what has been said on NATO's out-of-area operations in general.

NATO's out-of-area operations

The literature of NATO's out-of-area operation is closely linked to the discussion of NATO's future. The phenomenon is mainly studied through a historical lens, with NATO's different Strategic Concepts as main sources of analysis. Several issues reoccur. Firstly, there is a consensus that NATO's out-of-area policy started out during the Cold War as a 'nonpolicy'⁴. There was no official NATO policy on out-of-area operations as it could threaten the cohesion and subsequently, legitimacy and credibility of the Alliance due to members dissimilar interests, threat perception and ideologies⁵. Kitchen (2010) highlights this by analysing the increase in inter-ally disputes after the Cold War as out-of-area operations become part of defined policy⁶.

Post-Cold War, the policy of out-of-area operations is first mentioned in NATO's 1992 Strategic Concept, elaborated upon in the 1999 Concept, and further specified in the 2010 Strategic Concept⁷. The discussion on why NATO went from

⁴ As described by Frode Liland (1999).

⁵ Frode Liland (1999); Danielsen & Wilderberg (2014), pp. 17-18; Stuart & Tow (1999), p. 3.

⁶ Pp. 7-11.

⁷ Jakesevic (2018), p. 111; Sendmeyer (2010), Mihalache (2017), p. 52; Danielsen & Wilderberg (2014), ch. 1.

nonpolicy to policy seems to be a discussion between proponents of that it was a strategic move that was necessary to redefine and legitimate NATO's Post-Cold War's existence,- and those that argue it was a response to events relating to the new emerging security situation. Danielsen & Wilderberg (2014) argue that the first mentions of out-of-area policy in the period of 1992 to 1995 were driven by the Balkan operations and were expanded from 1995 onwards, and subsequently was consolidated in the Strategic Concept of 1999⁸. Sendmeyer (2010) specifies that the operations in Kosovo drove the revision of the Strategic Concept in 1999 and predicted that the 2010 Strategic Concept would be heavily influenced by the ISAF operation in Afghanistan⁹. Mihalache (2017) confirms, arguing that the 2010 and 1999 Strategic concepts are based on 'lessons learned' analysis and memoirs¹⁰.

The discussion on the event driven creation of out-of-area policy shows that it is focussed mainly on the time-frame from the 1999 Strategic Concept onwards.

The discussion that the out-of-area operations policy was created to redefine and legitimize NATO's existence relays back to the period directly after the Cold War. Asmus, Kugler and Larrabee (1993) coin the expression 'out-of-area or out of business' stating that NATO's Post-Cold War focus should be to create a security framework for Europe¹¹. NATO getting involved in out-of-area operations because individual member states and the European Community could not pick up the responsibility is further elaborate by Thies (2009). He concludes that the Alliance was needed to close the security gap in Europe and that NATO also needed this opportunity to prove its Post-

⁸ Pp. 24-25.

⁹ Pp. 13-14. Sendmeyer's work was written before the release of NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept (Feb, 14, 2010).

¹⁰ Pp. 244-245.

¹¹ P. 31

Cold War raison d'être¹².

While this tone is quite positive on creating policy on out-of-area operations, some authors do propose limitations. Mainly that the operations remain in the direct periphery of NATO. Booker (1990), Asmus et al. (1993), Stuart & Tow (1991), sources from the onset of out-of-area policy, suggest that if NATO is to extend their periphery, it should be directly to the south or east, remaining Europe focussed¹³.

Splitting these into three time-periods, the Cold-War years, 1991-1999, and 1999 onwards, there are some interesting observations. In the first period, where nonpolicy was necessary to retain cohesion, and with that legitimacy and credibility within, - and of the Alliance, is supported by evidence from the third period. However, the extension of out-of-area policy in the second period is observed as essential for the continuation of the Alliance. It would therefore be interesting to analyse a case in NATO's direct out-of-area periphery, as this is supported by early Post-Cold War scholars on out-of-area policy to renew NATO's legitimacy and raison d'être. After that it could be interesting to compare it to a case which is not in NATO's direct periphery. As in later literature there seems to be no distinction between out-of-area operations in NATO's direct, - or extended periphery and their effect on Alliance cohesion. The research question of this thesis will therefore be: *How does geographical distance of NATO's out-of-area operations influence Alliance Cohesion?*

Theoretical framework

When looking at the research question, the main variable that needs to be conceptualized and operationalized is "Alliance Cohesion", as NATO's out-of-area

¹² Chapter 6, p. 241

¹³ Stuart (1991); Booker (1990); Asmus et al. (1993)

operations already have been elaborated upon in the literature review. The variable of Geographical distance is straightforward, but in this analysis it will be used in the context of geographical distance between mainly the European Member states of the Alliance and the out-of-area operations. This has been chosen because originally the main area of defence of NATO was the European arena to secure the region for post-Second World War reconstruction efforts, defensive measures against the Soviets,- and later stabilization efforts in the Balkans as first policy backed- Alliance out-of-area operation¹⁴.

Alliance Cohesion

To measure the differences between the two cases the variable of Alliance Cohesion must first be unpacked. The study of Alliance formation and with that, Alliance Cohesion is mainly studied through a realist scope. For instance Walt (1987), Liska (1962), Ratti (2006), Calmels (2020) and Keohane, Haftendorn & Wallender (2004) argue that through a realist scope, threat perception is the main variable maintaining an Alliance. If the threat dissipates, the Alliance is of no more service to the states and will disintegrate.

Liland (1999), Danielsen & Wilderberg, (2014) and Stuart & Tow (1999) further argue through the realist scope, that aligned threat perception is a key component to Alliance Cohesion, and that similar threat perceptions are determined by aligned state interests and ideologies¹⁵. This does not however explain changes in cohesion in a persisting Alliance like NATO, which has outlasted its original purpose.

¹⁴ “North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) 1949”. *Department of State, U.S.A.*, n.y.. ; Danielsen & Wilderberg (2014).

¹⁵ Danielsen & Wilderberg (2014), pp. 17-18; Stuart & Tow (1999), p. 3; Liland (1999).

To rectify this, Weitsmann (2003) and Tuschhoff (1999) build on the realist framework, but add institutionalist elements to elaborate on Alliance behaviour. While Weitsmann (2003) still argues from the threat perception narrative of realist scholars, she adds extra dimensions like internal threat perception and power differences within Alliances to the equation of what creates cohesion. For instance, if domestically the member states of an alliance are experiencing a lot of instability in their country, a state has less chance of being able to follow up on their Alliance Commitments¹⁶. She underlines that thorough negotiation at the elite level is needed to maintain cohesion¹⁷.

Tuschhoff (1999) builds on the negotiation narrative in a NATO setting and argues that strong Alliance Institutions are what keep Alliance Cohesion together, - portrayed by endurance of NATO post-Cold War. This is because well-developed Alliance institutions can create more complex loyalties which increase the cost of abandoning commitments.

Finally, Kreps (2010) argues that Alliances persist because decision-making is only done at the level of elite consensus, and that public opinion is hardly considered in the decision-making process. This allows a focus on larger, strategic goals rather than domestic opinion. This view enforces the realist, interstate scope of analysis.

For this analysis the main variable will be the changing threat perception in the Alliance, based on elite level negotiations. Firstly because this is the main variable on which many of the cohesion scholars seem to agree on. Next, this thesis will take into account elite-level policy-making because the political and military policies of a state can be monitored and translated from national interests to alliance commitments.

¹⁶ P. 86

¹⁷ Pp. 111-112.

Geography in intervention

Now, the factor of Geography in intervention operations needs a closer look.

There seems to be a general consensus in the literature on geographical distance that ‘everything is related to each other, but near things are more related to each other’¹⁸. In Duque, Jetter & Sosa (2014) they find that the likelihood of UN military intervention decreases with 4% for every thousand kilometres removed from France, the US and the UK¹⁹. Durque et al. (2014) argue that proximity is important for intervention as the direct threat perception is clearer when there is a chance of spill-over effect from the conflicted territory²⁰. Pearson (1974) elaborates that geographical distance is a big cost, except for larger,- or super power states²¹. Furthermore, Pearson (1974) argues that smaller and middle states have less interest in intervening farther away as these states are usually more preoccupied with neighbourhood territorial, social, ideological and strategic issues²². Since NATO’s near periphery of out-of-area operations is based in Eastern and Southern Europe, this middle and smaller state argument might be relevant to at least the European response to out-of-area operations. Based on the theories on Alliance Cohesion and Geography in Intervention a hypothesis can be established that *due to a more overlapping threat perception, operations in close proximity have a more positive effect on Alliance Cohesion compared to operations in the extended periphery.*

¹⁸ Tobler (1970), p. 234.

¹⁹ P. 70.

²⁰ Pp. 70-71.

²¹ P. 438.

²² P. 454.

Methodology

For the analysis of this thesis a comparative case analysis between two NATO operations will be used. This is done because in the literature there are numerous singular case analyses and general theoretical testing analyses on Alliance Cohesion, but not so much in the context of comparing out-of-area operations in a near proximity or projected further away. While two case studies will probably not generate generalizable conclusions as a multi-case analysis, it is still worth conducting in an experimental approach to analysing differences between different types of out-of-area operations. For instance, Bennett (2004) states that small-N qualitative comparative analysis methods are good for finding underlying causalities between cases and path dependencies²³. Taking into consideration the limited scope of this thesis, allocating more space to an in-depth qualitative analysis of only two cases, will provide a valuable insight in the debate on NATO's out-of-area operations. It will also provide a method for further analysis of other cases in the future to find more causalities or confirm them.

Case Selection

The cases analysed in this thesis are the NATO missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan. These have been chosen because they are two of the longest operations in NATO history, with the operation in Afghanistan only recently having been concluded and efforts in Kosovo ongoing. This will provide the analysis with an extensive time frame to work with so changing factors in threat perception can be followed properly. Furthermore, while the Afghanistan operations started as a counter terrorism effort, after the initial combat part of the operation, its goal switched to projecting stability and

²³ Pp. 19-20.

state-building²⁴. The Kosovo operations were primarily focussed on stabilizing the area and later consolidating efforts in state-building measures²⁵. While the initial part of the operation in Afghanistan was dissimilar from the operation in Kosovo, both have prolonged periods of stabilizing and state-building efforts as the main focus in their operations.

Method of Analysis

The theoretical framework established that the main variable of analysis will be state's changing threat perceptions as determined at the elite-level in the comparison between the operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan. To analyse this within the qualitative scope of this thesis, the five largest contributors to the Alliance from the period when both the operations in Afghanistan and Kosovo began, have been chosen for comparison. The reason is based on the (realist) saying in the Melian Dialogue: 'The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must'. Stronger states in the Alliance have more capabilities, and will deliver on that, while smaller states in the Alliance will supply more international legitimacy for operations in exchange for protection²⁶. This is elaborated upon by the von Stackleberg (1934) game theory model as utilized by Weber, Weber & Wiesmeth (2021) on decision-making within Military Alliances. They argue that according to the von Stackleberg model, in a Military Alliance the 'Supreme Leader' makes the first decisions and contributions, after which the group of Leaders will endorse and add on to these decisions, where finally the followers accept the decisions and contributions accepted by the Supreme Leader and Leaders²⁷. The

²⁴ NATO, "Operations and Missions: Past and Present".

²⁵ Idem.

²⁶ Alyson, Thayer & Thorhallsson, (2016), pp. 9-12.

²⁷ Weber, Weber & Wiesmeth (2021), p. 905.

Supreme Leader is described here as the US' dominant role in Europe with regard to NATO operationality up until today. Leaders in this context are described as old member states of NATO, which have contributed less than the Supreme Leader but have gained influence due to their longevity of commitment to the Alliance. Followers are newer member states, who still have to build up credibility and therefore will follow the Supreme Leader, - and Leaders' decisions²⁸.

This leads to a reasoning that the strongest states' national interests will form smaller states' national interests towards the Alliance. Therefore the strongest countries will have the most influence on how both operations are conducted.

In this thesis, the nations which are determined as the strongest contributors are the states that spend the most on their defence costs in total from the period around the onset of both operations. The reason for this selection, and not the individual contribution of states towards both operations is because according to the reasoning above the most powerful states in general will determine the course of the Alliance the most, also around these operations. Furthermore, a consistent set of states is needed to make a proper comparison.

The five strongest states have been determined by looking up the Defence Expenditure numbers of NATO countries published in NATO's Press Release in 2011²⁹. Since the numbers are published in periods of 5 years, the numbers of 1995, 2000 and 2005 were taken into consideration since operations in Kosovo began in 1998 and Afghanistan in 2001. The numbers per country were summed up over these three years and organized

²⁸ P. 903.

²⁹ Table 1.

in descending order in Microsoft Excel. The results of this are the following five top countries: the US, France, UK, Germany and Italy.

The changes in threat perception as perceived at the elite level during both operations will be analysed for these five states.

Method of Source analysis

To analyse the changing threat perceptions over time process tracing will be used.

Process tracing is designed to analyse ‘whether, and how a potential cause or causes influenced a specific change or set of changes’ in a case study or a small number of case studies³⁰. Since this thesis analyses the changing Threat Perception of the selected states in two cases, process tracing will provide the most information on this trajectory. Other methods like narrative analysis would also be interesting to look at, but a limitation of narrative analysis is that within a multinational alliance, cultural differences and translation discrepancies make for a higher chance of misinterpretation of the sources.

To test the hypothesis the causal mechanisms of the change in Threat Perception must be established for both cases. According to Schuett & Hollingworth (2018) Threat perception is decided by how states gauge intent and capacity, after which decisions are made on what to do with this information³¹. Furthermore, the literature review suggests that the method of how states perceive intent and capacity relies on state interests and

³⁰ Intrac, ‘Process Tracing’, (2017),

³¹ Pp. 395-396.

ideology³². Other aspects mentioned which could influence Alliance Cohesion was internal stability in a state³³.

Analysing these variables and thus changing threat perceptions, can be done by looking at government reports on defence planning and official government statements on security issues. This is because, following Schuett & Hollingworth's (2018) reasoning, these sources are the result of observed intent and capacity of the potential threats to the state, and reflect state interests as to how to handle these intents and capacities of potential threats. Ideology in the case of this analysis falls together with changing state interests. There is no doubt that states are constantly changing, as are their ideologies. However, focussing on changing state interests explains the path towards new ideologies and what effect that has on Alliance Cohesion. In this sense, changing ideologies can be explained by changing state interests. Therefore this thesis will analyse government statements, reports and other primary source material on defence planning to find states' changes in their threat perception and whether those have drifted away from the Alliance commitments the member states agreed to and from one another.

Analysis

The analysis is split into two chapters, one for each case. Per chapter the five member states will be examined individually regarding their position towards the case. In the sub-conclusion of each chapter a comparison will be made between the five states and the observations will be presented.

³² Liland (1999), Danielsen & Wilderberg, (2014) and Stuart & Tow (1999), as mentioned in the literature review.

³³ Weitsmann (2003).

Kosovo

The United States of America

In the US National Security Strategy reports, Kosovo is first mentioned in 1997 as a notion of concern for the US regarding the threat to human security in the region³⁴. The tone of the report is one of promoting democratic ideals, with a heavy focus on the European arena³⁵. This continues in the 1998 version, where also diplomatic forms of intervention are introduced through NATO as deterrent and stabilizer³⁶.

In the 1999,- and 2000 version, Kosovo appears more extensively. Kosovo changed from concern, to primary example of US policy of humanitarian intervention through NATO³⁷. The operation in Kosovo brought forth an interventionist US policy compared to taking a back seat in European regional approaches.

Interestingly, in the reports after 2000, Kosovo disappears from the narrative. The Balkans are mentioned, but the US seems to have reverted back to the 1997-1998 narrative of leaving it to the Europeans.

Nowadays, the main US prerogative in Kosovo is to offer support to the European lead dialogues for further promotion of democratic values and stabilization³⁸.

Some observations can be made regarding threat perception. Pre-conflict, Kosovo was part of the larger efforts of stabilizing ex-Soviet countries and integrating them into Western areas of influence. This also explains why the US eventually got involved in the conflict. A chance of genocide under the democratic hegemon's rule

³⁴ Chapter III: "Integrated regional approaches". *The Balkans*.

³⁵ Chapter I: "Leadership today for a Safer, More Prosperous Tomorrow".

³⁶ Chapter III: "Integrated regional approaches": *Europe and Eurasia*.

³⁷ The times that Kosovo was mentioned sprung from 4 times in the 1998 version, to 15 in the 1999 version and to 29 times in the 2000 version.

³⁸ *Idem*.

would stain its reputation.

Not much has changed for the US' threat perception. Its main goal is still the inclusion of Kosovo in as many as possible Western spheres of influences³⁹.

However, the main threat perception at the onset of the situation was the geopolitical goal of promoting new leadership under the US hegemon. Nowadays the prerogative in Kosovo is retention of influence. A stable Kosovo which is implementing US/Western ideals is a creator of credibility for US hegemony. It's importance fluctuates based on the stability of other geopolitical factors influencing US hegemony.

France

For France the operation in Kosovo was a relatively new phenomena of France operating outside of its area-of-influence⁴⁰. At this point in time France was integrating back into NATO's Military Committee⁴¹. Kosovo plays an important role in this transition. France had up until the end of the Cold War been a firm believer in that French independence and sovereignty was the highest strategic importance⁴².

French ambitions changed after the Cold War with a wish to find its role in the Post dual world order. In which France's ambitions were oriented towards creating a stronger, resilient Europe, less dependent on US protection. This is a main theme in the 1994, 2008, 2013 and 2017 White Papers of the French Government. Kosovo is one of the first operations where France conveys its European ambitions by taking a strong, active positioning in the negotiating process within NATO, deepening institutional processes for influence, often threatening its veto in the process⁴³. France in this regard

³⁹ US Department of State: "U.S. Relations with Kosovo". July 28, 2021.

⁴⁰ Chevènement & Sebag (2009), p. 151.

⁴¹ Idem.

⁴² Ibid, p. 153.

⁴³ Auerswald (2004), p. 650.

is not perse opposing other states in the Alliance policy-wise, it merely wants to convey its ability to influence. As the White Paper of 2008 mentions:

‘It is not the relevance of the principles of independence that require rethinking, but the institutional transposition of these principles in the Alliance’⁴⁴.

The focus on independence makes that France was also opposed to the idea of the Alliance operating without a UN mandate, where France holds a position in the Security Council⁴⁵.

While the US has backed away from Kosovo in their security papers, France has made Kosovo an increasingly important strategic component in their White Papers. The 2017 White Paper has the most extensive policy brief on Kosovo of all the White Papers, and is firmly used as example of France’s wish to take European responsibility for a European issue⁴⁶.

What also fuelled an increased perception of threat was that in several terrorist attacks in France, weapons originating from Kosovo were used⁴⁷. Stabilization was therefore not only a show of a more proactive European power projector, but became an important part of territorial defence.

The United Kingdom

The UK played a proactive role in Kosovo, either diplomatically or militarily. Herein they seem to be in line with the new rhetoric regarding humanitarian intervention from the US. The UK’s Strategic Defence Reviews of the Blair government, where the new

⁴⁴ The French White Paper on Defence and National Security, (2008), p. 24.

⁴⁵ Priest, (Sep 20, 1999).

⁴⁶ Defence and National Security Strategic Review White Paper, (2017). Pp. 24-26.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 31.

defence strategy calls for flexible military units to be dispatched based on humanitarian and moral grounds, shows this⁴⁸. Moral obligations based on historical references plays a key role in the Reviews⁴⁹.

The importance of moral obligations to intervene is used by the UK to legitimize the NATO operation without a UN mandate. The UK realised that using NATO in this way would also pave the way to a reinvented, credible NATO⁵⁰. Unlike France, the UK regards NATO as the dominant security alliance in Europe, and wishes to strengthen European capabilities within a NATO context⁵¹.

Where the UK diverges from the US, is the method of operation. The UK took a leading role in the diplomatic talks leading up to the intervention, but once negotiations were over, the UK pleaded for a more intense approach than the US. The UK's fear of instability in Kosovo, and what it could mean for European stability, lead to the UK pleading for the use of ground forces, rather than solely a strategic bombing operation⁵². Stabilization was not possible through solely bombing operations⁵³.

After the conflict ended, the UK remained actively involved in Kosovo and offered more specialized support. The UK pulled out military troops but came back in through UN and EU programmes to support institution building efforts and played a leading role in the Yugoslavia tribunal⁵⁴.

The threat perception of Kosovo for the UK was one that was close to home historically. Combined with its preference for the Transatlantic security bond over a

⁴⁸ Strategic Defence Review, (1998), ch. 1-3.

⁴⁹ Keohane, (2000). P. 81.

⁵⁰ Keohane (2000), p. 91.

⁵¹ McCourt, (2013), pp. 248-249.

⁵² Ibid. pp. 249-251.

⁵³ Keohane (2000), p. 94.

⁵⁴ Doyle & Morina, (2013), pp. 8-11.

solely European approach lead to accepting the terms of only air operations. The high threat perception of instability in the Balkans did not dissipate after the military operations ended. The national threat perception even increased as the UK realises that the military operations are no guarantee for a lasting peace. This institution building efforts and providing specialised support are still one of the important priorities for the UK today⁵⁵.

Germany

Strategically, the decision to intervene in Kosovo showed the other Western states that the recently unified Germany was committed to fully integrating into the Western sphere of influence (*Westbindung*⁵⁶). However, Germany was also subject to large refugee streams from ex-Soviet countries, most from the former Yugoslavia. This was a more tangible threat than the strategic component of participation⁵⁷.

Previously, Germany was hesitant to participate in crisis management operations outside of its own territory due to the nation's historical context. The proximity and direct consequences of the Kosovo conflict felt by Germany steered German policy towards the incorporation of military options in their foreign policy, next to ally commitment expectations⁵⁸.

However, unlike the other European nations, Germany did not strive for post-Cold War power projection based on humanitarian ideals, and it remains hesitant to use military force. This is portrayed by Germany's refusal to participate in the conflict in Iraq in 2001. Compared to the UK and the UK, Kosovo for Germany is less important

⁵⁵ Grogan, (2019).

⁵⁶ Friedrich, Ischinger & Scharping, (2000). P. 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 1-5.

⁵⁸ Miskimmon, (2009), pp. 562-563.

to regain credibility for the Alliance, and more to promote a civilian type of power for its integration into the West⁵⁹. For instance, rather than preferring a multilateral approach but within a singular organisation, Germany speaks in its White paper (2006) about keeping multiple international organisations involved to create a broad legitimacy⁶⁰. Furthermore, it promotes a regional approach to stabilization and conflict resolution.

In Kosovo, Germany has been a firm supporter of the OSCE as preferred international organisation. This is because it cuts through the East/West divide and keeps Russia also at the table⁶¹.

This has changed in recent years. In Germany's White Paper of 2016, there is a determined tone in strengthening military efforts in NATO, cohesion in the EU and Germany taking global responsibility as a large European power⁶².

The threat perception of Kosovo for Germany began as a regional threat, where dealing with the situation was important to curb spill-over effects in Germany. Stability in Kosovo nowadays has gained geopolitical importance as relations with Russia sour. Germany's integrative approach towards the region has turned to retaining Western influence and stability.

Italy

For Italy, the direct spill-over effects of instability in the Balkans were even more directly noticeable compared to Germany. The geographical proximity made the region an important trade partner for Italy. On top of that the security spill-overs of organized

⁵⁹ Hyde-Price (2001), pp. 20-21.

⁶⁰ White paper on German security policy, (2006). Chapt. 2 & 3, p. 15.

⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 44-45.

⁶² White paper on German security policy, (2016). Pp. 21-22.

crime and refugees meant that Kosovo from an historical perspective was an important area-of-influence for Italian external strategy⁶³. Italy's southern geographical positioning is described as an 'arc of instability'⁶⁴. Therefore, sustainable stabilization efforts to bring Kosovo in to the European sphere of influence, stands high on the Italian strategy agenda continuing on today⁶⁵. Like Germany, Italy prefers to work through multiple international organisations, mainly due to its economic interests in the region where a civilian socio/economic approach more important⁶⁶. The reason that Italy agreed to a military intervention through airstrikes was not that it just wanted to show its loyalty to the Alliance, but rather that an integrated Kosovo could shift "Europe's geopolitical equilibrium between northern and southern Member States"⁶⁷. This could gain more geopolitical influence in the EU, NATO and the Mediterranean area.

The Italian case is interesting as it is the country with the most threat of security spill-overs and economic repercussions compared to the aforementioned states. The geopolitical integrative aspect of either a stronger European security force or a show of dedication to NATO was important, but for Italy, Kosovo has been of national interest since the unification of the peninsula⁶⁸.

Sub Conclusions Kosovo: Geopolitical to Regional

It is not an unexpected result that the operations in Kosovo set the tone for a Post-Cold War NATO due to its success in showing cohesion. For example, Miranda (2011) says

⁶³ Miranda (2011), pp. 4-8; Marrone, (2020), Ch. 1-2.

⁶⁴ Mirada, (2011), p. 6

⁶⁵ Frontini, (10 July, 2017).

⁶⁶ Mirada, (2011), p. 7

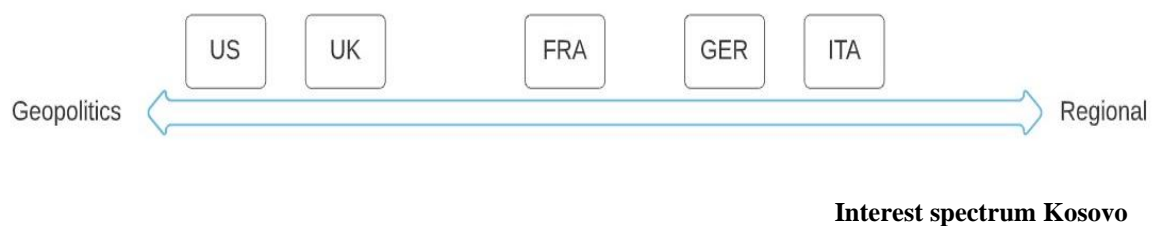
⁶⁷ Frontini, (2017).

⁶⁸ Idem.

for Italy: “Italian strategic interests in the Balkans tend to coincide with international norms”⁶⁹. This seems to be the case for all the main European countries involved; the regional strategic interests and the geopolitical strategic interests could be satisfied through the same operations regarding Kosovo.

This is not to say that the conflict was without internal disagreements. At the operational level and tactical levels there were discrepancies. However, at the strategic level it was possible to maintain cohesion.

Furthermore, the country analyses suggest that there is a gradation of geopolitical interests to regional interests which weighed into the decision to intervene in Kosovo.



Observing the state threat perception graded from geopolitical perception to regional perception, we can see that the US saw Kosovo as a threat to how it wished to portray itself as hegemon, the base of which is the promotion of Western ideals globally. In line with Weber, Weber & Wiesmeth’s (2021) theory on the dynamics between “Supreme Leaders” and “Leaders” as discussed in the methodology, the Leaders (the European nations) copy this as an important reason for intervention, just to different degrees. The UK, where maintaining the Transatlantic bond fell together with the humanitarian

⁶⁹ p. 9.

reasons to intervene based on historical precedent, were well in line with the US' geopolitical goals.

For the other European nations, the Transatlantic link was of importance, especially because they realised that a European organisation could not bear the burden yet. However, the regional considerations also came into play.

For France, the operation starts out as a geopolitical endeavour to promote its position for a stronger European cohesion. Eventually the stabilization of Kosovo becomes vital because it became a national security threat.

Germany and Italy both felt the direct effects of the conflict the most. This is not to say that both nations did not still have clear geopolitical considerations. Germany's geopolitical goals were to promote a more civilian type of superpower, while Italy wished to expand its influence internationally by integrating Kosovo into its area-of-influence.

What can be seen here is that in the case of France, Germany and Italy, the cohesion of the Alliance was not a prime objective, it was a tool to promote their own geopolitical and/or regional interests. However, the regional objectives for the region overlapped with the geopolitical objectives of the hegemon (US), through which cohesion could be maintained. While the threat perceptions were not coming from the same source of concern, they did all point towards one goal: stabilizing Kosovo.

Afghanistan

The United States of America

The war in Afghanistan was from the onset an American endeavour, based on the 9/11 attacks on American soil. The primary threat perception of the US was the physical

security of the United States and the goal in Afghanistan was to prevent the country from becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups⁷⁰.

However, this was not the only reason for declaring war. Afghanistan contains large quantities of many different valuable natural resources, which has made the territory historically interesting for regional/global hegemons. For the U.S., as global hegemon, the threat perception of other regional hegemon contenders (China/Russia) gaining control over those valuable resources is likely to be a better explanation why the US remained involved in asserting control over Afghanistan for 20 years⁷¹. The US decided at first that it would assert full control of operations. While it did involve the Alliance by invoking the Article 5 protocol, the Alliance played a marginal role at the onset⁷². If this was an operation based on the common threat perception of territorial security for which state-building and promotion of democratic values was key, the US would have promoted a more multilateral approach through the Alliance similarly to Kosovo.

The necessity for operational homogeneity was a show of power to assert control over a strategic region.

The geopolitical angle also translates to the change in threat perception for the US as the operations drag on for years, namely the loss of credibility for the US due to the lack of progress and failure to establish a common strategy within the Alliance⁷³.

⁷⁰ Crocker, (November 17, 2021).

⁷¹ Fallon, (2013). Pp. III-XI.

⁷² Noetzel & Scheer, (2009), pp. 214-215.

⁷³ Fuller, (2021).

France

France showed its commitment to the Alliance by being one of the first supporters of the US after it had declared an Article 5 situation. France with this cited its responsibilities for the Alliance which entails the support of an Ally⁷⁴. However, multiple sources indicate that France had no strategic interest in Afghanistan. Rather it was focussed on the operations in Kosovo, Africa and Lebanon⁷⁵.

This lack of strategic interest in Afghanistan itself meant the changing threat perception of the Afghanistan operations lies with political implications, not with the physical security of France. French leadership seems to navigate between maintaining strong ties with the US by enlarging French participation in Afghanistan, as done under Sarkozy's government; and pulling troops out of Afghanistan and redistributing them to other operations abroad, being more in line with France's actual strategic interests and therefore gathering more national support, like under Hollande's government⁷⁶.

Furthermore, similarly to Kosovo, France wishes to promote the capacities of the EU regarding state-building efforts in Afghanistan, while keeping NATO purely militarily. France is against the NATO-led PRTs as they perceive this a task for the EU. Because France has no strategic interest in Afghanistan, but has a strategic interest to form its international reputation as EU leader, a civilian approach lead by the EU was favoured. This way France is a credible ally, while also promoting its interests⁷⁷.

Even though there was no national strategic benefit from France's involvement

⁷⁴ Schmitt, (2018).

⁷⁵ Idem.; Sand, (2021).

⁷⁶ Schmitt, (2018); Fescharek (2015), p. 123.

⁷⁷ Ibid, pp. 131-132.

in Afghanistan, it was one of the main contributors to the operations in Afghanistan. An ally but vocal about its own global agenda⁷⁸.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been a staunch supporter of US policy in both the Afghanistan,- and Iraq campaigns compared to other European Allies. Historically, The UK has been involved in Afghanistan for the same geopolitical reasons as the US. However for this campaign the United Kingdom acted similarly to France, supporting the the US as part of their Alliance commitments rather than historical considerations⁷⁹. The Blair administration furthered its reasoning for intervention in Afghanistan based on successful R2P in Kosovo, whilst the Bush administration showed scepticism towards this angle. The UK focussed on the brutal Taliban regime and the violations of human rights, rather than the harbouring of Al-Qaida leadership⁸⁰. The commitment to the Alliance furthermore could assist in leveraging influence over US policy⁸¹. This was exercised in a sort of ‘exceptionalism’ of British COIN methods, dictated by their colonial past⁸².

Consequently, the United Kingdom seemed to suffer from similar issues as the French, namely that the interests in Afghanistan more to do with geopolitical image building than with Afghanistan itself. The military was not equipped to serve outside of its ‘Arc of Concern’ and the redeployed humanitarian development teams coming from African operations showed poor understanding of cultural factors⁸³. This led to a loss of

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 134-135.

⁷⁹ Select Committee on International Relations and Defence, (2019). “The UK and Afghanistan”. Pp. 11-13.

⁸⁰ Dorman, (2015), pp. 109-111.

⁸¹ Idem.

⁸² Ibid, p.113.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 110, pp. 115-116.

popularity under the military command for the operations.

The change in threat perception from the political viewpoint came furthermore also from the 7/7 bombings and stories of apprehended terrorist attacks of which the origins were perceived from the Western presence in Afghanistan and Iraq⁸⁴. These perceptions combined, the overstretch of the military with limited stabilizing results, which in turn was perceived as an increase of domestic insecurity meant the involvement in Afghanistan became the threat to British security.

Germany

Germany has been one of the most reluctant states to get involved in Afghanistan. The government did eventually gain a voting majority to send troops, but it did threaten Chancellor Schroeder's position⁸⁵. The promise was that the troops would be utilized for humanitarian operations. Germany's strict rules of engagements, continuously checked by parliament; - limits on expenditure; - and a severe dislike for the use of force, immobilized potential German military efforts, and showed the severe reluctance of maintaining Alliance commitment⁸⁶.

After positioning itself in the region as a contributor to humanitarian aid and development, one of Germany's interests became hard to maintain after the Kunduz disaster⁸⁷. Namely that Germany was to be morally a superpower⁸⁸. This tightrope walk between assuring opposition parties in government that the operation in Afghanistan was a legitimate for the use of German forces to maintain Alliance commitments, was tested every time German forces were asked by Allied forces in the region to move

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 118.

⁸⁵ Mattox, (2015). P. 95.

⁸⁶ Ibid. pp. 96-98.

⁸⁷ N. Werkhäuser, (2011).

⁸⁸ C. Stelzenmueller, (Sept 9, 2009), p.8.

outside of their designated area of operation.

When ISAF implemented PRT operations, this temporarily worked in Germany's favour as it was development based. It took the focus away from military engagement⁸⁹. However, in recent years up until the Alliance's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the effectiveness of the PRT's became a source of frustration. It seems that the operation in Afghanistan has not added additional legitimacy of operations outside of Europe's sphere of influence as the same strategic deadlock between pacifist's approach and committing to Alliance mandates continued to exist.

Italy

Italy showed less hesitancy to join the operations in Afghanistan compared to Germany, but did share its strategic objectives. From the onset of operations Italy has been vocal in support of the operation hoping to portray itself as a reliable ally to the Alliance and has repeated this over the years⁹⁰. In its political narrative there has been a divergence with France, the UK and the US but is in line with Germany that the operation should be a peace keeping,- and state-building mission⁹¹. The military aspect of the operation took to the background in the Italian perspective, with economic development being the main priority⁹².

International reputation, setting a moral example and being a committed member to the Alliance are important to Italy. This is shown in how the government frames the Afghan operations. Even when the operations gained a more aggressive military character in the period from 2008 onwards, the Italian threat perception is to maintain a

⁸⁹ Mattox, (2015), pp. 100-101.

⁹⁰ Kreps, (2010). Pp. 207-210.

⁹¹ Ruffa (2018), p. 96.

⁹² Idem.

moral international image rather than a military success⁹³.

As the main defender of the Southern European border of the Alliance, maintaining strong bonds within the Alliance is one of Italy's main strategic considerations. Therefore focus is maintained on proving its reliability to the US⁹⁴. This perception is maintained throughout the mission in Afghanistan, as Italy continued to closely coordinate their manoeuvres with the Alliance members even during the messy departure from Afghanistan⁹⁵. The threat perception of the missions in Afghanistan for Italy therefore is one of a threat towards Alliance Cohesion in the sense that the mission might fracture bonds while Italy is trying to maintain bonds.

Sub-conclusion Afghanistan: Securitization vs. Interests.

The variable of most importance for the case of Afghanistan is how much value the European states attach to their alliance with the US, as none have a direct national interest in Afghanistan. To note, none of the states deserted from their commitments, and all agreed to step-in when the US cited Article V. But the level of commitment varies over time during the operations. The threat perception at the base for the countries involved is therefore the success they have in securitizing the Afghan operations and whether the Alliance commitment can be translated as a priority over counter national interests, being interests which do not align well with Alliance commitment. Counter national interests replace regional interest for Afghanistan.



⁹³ Coticchia & D'Amato, (2018), pp. 234-235.

⁹⁴ Davidson, (2014). Pp. 266-267.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 269.

The US and Italy both seem to have the least national counter interests. For the US the operation started out with a securitization regarding national security (counterterrorism), the strategic interest specifically was of securing an important geopolitical area. Even though as the operations progressed and stability could not be created in the region, this remained the incentive to stay in the region for as long as the US did, until other Geopolitical interests gained traction in US policy.

For Italy the reason for maintaining Alliance Cohesion was important enough to maintain a credible commitment to the Alliance as this is of high value to Italy as being one of the main forces on Europe's Southern flank. This is shown through thorough communication with the US and other Alliance members continuing through to the retreat from Afghanistan. Showing the value and cohesion of the Alliance is enough as Italy finds itself surrounded by unstable territory and needs a strong Alliance to back it up.

France and the UK have no national interests in Afghanistan itself, but a big interest in showing their commitment to the Alliance and promoting their geopolitical agendas. This is challenged as active involvement in Afghanistan leads to national security threats in the form of national terrorist attacks. This, in combination of lack of end goals and little strategic insight, makes it difficult to maintain the securitization of Afghanistan as it counteracts national security and other regions of direct strategic interest require attention.

Finally, Germany is the most hesitant to enter, -and stay in the game. The awkwardness of adhering to Alliance commitment and trying to align it with other national interest is immediately visible. The securitization of Afghanistan has cost several German political figures their position, and the strict bonds on the military to

provide humanitarian assistance almost incapacitated German involvement multiple times. Afghanistan did not serve as a reputation builder for Germany as a morally superior, civilian interventionist state, rather it tested it.

Kosovo vs. Afghanistan

This final chapter compares the findings of the analysis. Analysing the main findings presented in Table 1 and Table 2 we can observe that the operation in Kosovo had a more aligned threat perception between the cases, compared to the operations in Afghanistan. It can be observed seen that in the Kosovo Table, interests and securitization overlap. This means that the national interests are attainable through the pursuit of geopolitical interests, - and can be upheld in legitimacy through credible securitization. The promotion of a new geopolitical spread of democracy and Western values was combined with genuine national security threats of spill-over if the Alliance would not intervene. Additionally, the counter balancing interests in the Kosovo case are much less severe than in Afghanistan.

At the operational level, regarding whether the states preferred a strong military approach or a civilian approach, there are still some differences. Also within the preference for a military approach there are discrepancies in preferences for solely airstrikes (US) and boots on the ground (All others). As the operation carried on over the years, these discrepancies seemed to smooth over after the initial period of combat was concluded successfully.

The overlap in national, regional interest and geopolitical interests, with weak counter interests provided Alliance members an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone: maintain Alliance cohesion and pursue national interests.

Table 1: Kosovo

	U.S.A.	France	U.K.	Germany	Italy
Interest	Securing Geopolitical strategic area	European security + international reputation	European security + international reputation	European security + national security + international reputation	European security + national security + economic incentives + international reputation
Securitization	Prevention of human atrocities, R2P	European security + prevention of human atrocities, R2P	European security + prevention of human atrocities, R2P	European security + prevention of human atrocities, R2P	European security + national security + prevention of human atrocities, R2P
Military/Civilian	Military	Military/ Civ	Military/ Civ	Civilian	Military/ Civ
Counterbalancing interest	Allies responsibility	Other conflict areas of national interest	none	Pacifist reputation	None

The case of Afghanistan is more ambiguous. While none of the states defected from their Alliance commitment, it was more of a struggle to adhere to the commitments, and to define what the commitments should entail.

For Afghanistan there seems to be a coherence between states regarding their interests for the missions; international reputation through showing commitment to the Alliance and more specifically showing that they are a reliable ally to the US. This is however hard to translate to another political goal which was crucial for reinvigorating NATO after the Cold War: namely R2P and the spread of democratic values. The US and the UK went into the conflict based on a presumption of war, damaging the ability to securitize the missions in Afghanistan as a humanitarian mission for the European nations. This became increasingly harder after the intervention-linked terrorist attacks

on European soil. The missions in Afghanistan became a bigger security threat over time than the situation pre-operation. Finally, with the main *raison d'être* weakened, counter national interests started to increase in value. For the US other geopolitical areas of contention were flaring up, like more direct confrontations with other geopolitical powers. For the EU member states, other security situations became more dire as increasingly more resources were spent on trying to unsuccessfully stabilize Afghanistan, decreasing the effectiveness of other operations.

Afghanistan did not break the Alliance, no member country has a wish to break away from NATO, and outside nations still wish to join. However, Afghanistan was hard to sell from the onset as a NATO mission, because it missed a national interest, and thus an end goal for the European countries.

Table 2: Afghanistan

	U.S.A.	France	U.K.	Germany	Italy
Interest	Securing Geopolitical strategic area	International reputation+ Bonds with US	International reputation+ Bonds with US	International reputation	International reputation + ties with the US
Securitization	Global war on terror	Alliance Commitment	Alliance commitment + humanitarian grounds	Humanitarian grounds	Alliance commitment + Humanitarian grounds
Military/Civilian	Military	Military	Military/civilian	Civilian	Civilian
Counter balancing interest	Damage to credibility	Other conflict areas of national interest + National terrorism threat	Loss of support of military + National terrorism threat	Fragile governmental approval + Damage to international reputation	The threat the operation poses to Alliance Cohesion

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to answer the question on how geographical distance of NATO's out-of-area operations influence Alliance Cohesion. Using a case study between the NATO operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan to analyse the changing threat perception of the five largest contributors to NATO at the onset of both operations.

The hypothesis that operations in close proximity should provide a more positive effect on Alliance Cohesion compared to operations in the extended periphery has proven correct. With the operations in Kosovo, national interests could be merged with geopolitical interests as they both served the same end goal. Afghanistan proved a challenge to Alliance cohesion as there were no national interests, and the securitization of the geopolitical interests for the operation were incapacitated by the dynamics of entering a region with the intention of war, while wishing to portray the Alliance as a contributor to stabilization and democratic values. Additionally, due to a lack of

national interest in Afghanistan, counter national interests started to weigh heavier in mainly the EU countries' security decision-making.

There are some limitations to this thesis. Firstly, with a comparison between only two NATO operations, this conclusion cannot be generalizable. However, conducting research in this fashion did provide interesting dynamics to observe and can hopefully be applied to other cases in the future to create a more generalizable comparative model.

Secondly, this thesis did not take public opinion into consideration, rather only primary academic sources and state-level strategic papers. Integrating the effect of public opinion on political decision-making regarding NATO operations would be an interesting perspective to consider in prospective articles.

To conclude, with the changing geopolitical situation and the re-emergence of great power competition, more research on the effect of geographical distance of operations on Alliance Cohesion can assist in creating sound strategic decision-making for the Alliance in the future. With this thesis a method of analysis has been added to the discussion, and hopefully will be extended upon in the future.

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