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Alliances

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Chapter ??
Alliances
John S. Duffield

Abstract

This chapter explores the concept and theories of alliances, paying particular attention to the question of alliance persistence and disintegration. After discussing what alliances are, the chapter surveys the scholarly literature on why alliances form and fall apart. It then reviews the somewhat puzzling case of NATO, which many observers expected would not long outlive the Cold War. The chapter asks how well existing theories explain NATO's persistence and concludes with theoretically-informed observations about the alliance's future prospects.

Introduction: Why Study Alliances?

Alliances are one of the most significant phenomena in security studies and world politics more generally. Indeed, the eminent American political scientist, George Moldeski, once described alliance as 'one of a dozen or so key terms of International Relations' (1963: 773). For hundreds of years, great powers, and many smaller ones as well, have regularly formed, acted through, and, sometimes, broken alliances. Alliance diplomacy has typically constituted a major component of states' external policies.

Why is this so? Because alliances are one of the most valuable instruments for advancing a state's interests. In particular, alliances are a primary tool for enhancing a state's security in the face of external and, sometimes, internal threats. Focusing on the international realm, Kenneth Waltz (1979: 118) has noted that the means available to states for achieving their ends fall into just two categories: internal efforts and external efforts, including moves to strengthen and enlarge one's own alliance or to weaken and opposing one. And for smaller states with limited resources, reliance on alliances may be the only option. Thus the formation and use of alliances is a frequent response to the dangers of aggression and the opportunities for aggrandizement present in the international system.

Not surprisingly, alliances have been quite common in modern history. The most

comprehensive database on alliances, based on the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) project, lists a total of some 648 alliances between 1815 and 2003 (Leeds et al. 2002).¹ Most alliances have been quite small, with the average number of members being just over three. But the major powers and European states have turned to alliances quite frequently. Just six European powers – the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Russia/Soviet Union – account for one-quarter of all alliance memberships during that period.

Arguably, alliances have also had a major impact on international relations. After all, states would presumably not form or maintain alliances if they were not thought to serve the states' interests in ways that were otherwise impossible or less cost-effective. In addition, a number of studies have established that alliances have been an important determinant of the outbreak, spread, and results of militarized conflicts. As Stephen Walt has written, 'The formation and cohesion of international alliances can have profound effects on the security of individual states and help determine both the probability and likely outcome of war' (1997: 156).

This chapter explores the concept and theories of alliances, paying particular attention to the question of alliance persistence and disintegration. After surveying what the scholarly literature has to say about the issue, it examines the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after the Cold War.

Definitions: What Is An Alliance?

The conclusions that one draws about the causes and effects of alliances depend very much on what one counts as an alliance. And, unfortunately, the process of developing theories of alliances has been complicated by the use of widely varying definitions.

A number of influential definitions of alliances have been overly broad. For example, Walt, in his seminal study on the origins of alliances, defined alliance as 'a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states' (1987: 1). An almost identical definition was used by Michael Barnett and Jack Levy in their path-breaking work on the domestic sources of alliances (1991: 370). More recently, Patricia Weitsman has described alliances as 'bilateral or multilateral

agreements to provide some element of security to the signatories' (2004: 27).

Such broad definitions are reflected in quantitative coding schemes. In their efforts to be comprehensive, the most complete alliance data bases have grouped together defensive alliances, offensive alliances, non-aggression pacts, neutrality pacts, and consultation agreements. Further complicating matters is the fact that a high percentage of these so-called 'alliances' – more than half (364 of 648) in the case of the ATOP data set – consist of two or more types.

There are at least two potential problems with such broad definitions of alliances. First, they may be so expansive as to encompass just about any imaginable security arrangement between states. Of particular concern is the fact that they blur the important distinction between alliances, on the one hand, and collective security arrangements, on the other, which involve fundamentally different orientations. Alliances are primarily, if not exclusively, outwardly oriented, intended to enhance the security of their members vis-à-vis external parties. In sharp contrast, collective security arrangements and related phenomena such as arms control agreements are designed to enhance the security of their participants vis-à-vis each other.

The other problem is the failure to distinguish between various forms of security cooperation. The above definitions would seem to embrace all manner of security cooperation, no matter how innocuous. Thus, they include alliances that might be limited to supportive diplomacy or economic aid with security objectives. What has traditionally distinguished alliances from many other security arrangements between states, however, is the emphasis that they place on military forms of assistance, especially the use of force.

Such considerations suggest the need for a subset of alliance definitions that take these important distinctions into account. Four decades ago, Robert Osgood defined alliance as 'a formal agreement that pledges states to co-operate in using their military resources against a specific state or states and usually obligates one or more of the signatories to use force, or to consider (unilaterally or in consultation with allies) the use of force in specified circumstances' (1968: 17). Similarly, Glenn Snyder, in his magnum opus *Alliance Politics*, wrote that 'Alliances are formal associations of states for the use (or

nonuse) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership.’ He went on to emphasize that ‘[t]heir primary function is to pool military strength against a common enemy, not to protect alliance members from each other’ (1997: 4). And even Walt later amended his conception of alliances, noting that ‘the defining feature of any alliance is a commitment for mutual military support against some external actor(s) in some specified set of circumstances’ (1997: 157).

These definitions clearly exclude a number of agreements that have sometimes been treated as alliances. In particular, they would seem to militate against the inclusion of pledges by states to refrain from engaging in aggression against one another, promises to remain neutral in the event of a military conflict with a third party, and commitments to consult in the event of a crisis that threatens to lead to war. Nevertheless, hundreds of security arrangements meet the more stringent criteria contained in them.

Before proceeding, it may be useful to consider one further distinction. Even these more restrictive definitions encompass both defensive and offensive alliances. Primarily offensive alliances, however, are relatively rare and almost always short-lived. Of the 277 offensive and/or defensive alliances listed in the ATOP database, only 14 were purely offensive. Of those 14, moreover, only four lasted more than two years, and all began and ended during the 19th century.² In view of these considerations, the remainder of this chapter will focus on alliances with a defensive purpose, including those that might also have had an offensive element (about 25 percent).

Even when the focus is limited to defensive international military alliances, there are a number of possible important issues to explore. Among the topics that have received the most attention from scholars are the following:

- Alliance formation: Under what conditions do states form alliances? Who aligns with whom?
- Alliance dynamics: How are alliance policies and strategies determined? How are burdens shared among alliance members? What determines the relative degree of alliance cohesion?
- Alliances and state behavior: Do alliances influence the behavior of their members? Do states honour their alliance commitments when called upon to do

so?

- Alliances and war: Do alliances make war more or less likely? In particular, do alliances deter aggression against their members? Do alliances embolden their members to act with less restraint? When war occurs, do alliances improve their members' prospects of victory?

Clearly, these are far too many questions to explore thoroughly in a single book, let alone in a short chapter such as this. Motivated by what some would describe as NATO's puzzling persistence after the cold war, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the question of why some alliances endure while others disintegrate.

Explanations of Alliance Persistence and Collapse

Most international military alliances have ended at one point or another. But some have lived to a ripe old age while others have quickly fallen apart.

How long have alliances tended to last? Of the approximately 263 defensive alliances (both purely defensive and with a combination of both defensive and offensive elements) in existence between 1815 and 2003, the mean duration was 13.4 years with a standard deviation of 13.1 years. Interestingly, defensive alliances with no offensive component have tended to last nearly twice as long on average as those with an offensive component, with average life spans of 15.1 and 8.2 years, respectively. This striking difference exists even though some 42 of the 197 purely defensive alliances in the ATOP data base had not yet terminated as of 2003.

Have more recent alliances tended to last longer than earlier ones? Although such longitudinal comparisons may be problematic, there is some evidence to suggest that they do. Consider the periods 1815-1865 and 1945-1995. Both are long intervals of relative peace immediately following a major power war. During the first period, the mean alliance duration was 8.7 years, with a standard deviation of 10.3 years. During the latter period, the average life span was 17.7 years, with a standard deviation of 13.7 years. Similar differences in durability are found even if one considers only purely defensive alliances, even though more than one-third (42 of 124) of those between 1945 and 1995 were ongoing as of 2003.

What factors cause alliances to persist or to collapse? And can they account for this seeming temporal shift in alliance longevity? One obvious factor is major war and the shifts in the map of international politics that such wars can occasion. Of the approximately 40 alliances formed before 1870, only two outlived the wars of German unification. Likewise, only two of the alliances in existence before World War I remained after that conflict was over. And only five of the alliances formed before World War II, including such peripheral pairings as Turkey-Afghanistan and Russia-Mongolia, remained standing when the conflagration came to an end. In other words, major wars tend to sweep the landscape clean of alliances.

Of greater interest, then, are the factors other than war that help alliances to endure or cause them to fall apart. The following sub-sections examine a number of such factors. The analysis is limited, however, to those theories that seem most relevant to the question of NATO's persistence after Cold War. It does not aspire to provide a truly comprehensive survey of the causes of alliance persistence and collapse that have been hypothesized, although it encompasses most of the prominent ones.

Theories of Alliance Formation

The first place to look is at explanations of alliance formation. Such an approach may at first seem counterintuitive. But, arguably, as long as the factors that caused the alliance to form in the first place remain in place, then the alliance will endure. Should those conditions change, however, then the alliance may lose the glue that held it together and fall apart.

In principle, states can freely join alliances. In practice, however, they do not enter into such arrangements lightly, for alliance membership has costs as well as potential benefits. Among those costs may be the loss of autonomy and the creation of dependence. Thus, we need to ask, under what circumstances are states willing to assume and bear these costs? For the purposes of this chapter, the most relevant theories of alliance formation fall into two categories: those that emphasize international determinants and those that focus on domestic factors.

1. International Determinants: Capabilities Aggregation Models

The most prominent international explanations of alliance formation are associated with the realist school of International Relations. Also known as capabilities aggregation models, they emphasize how states form alliances in order to combine their military capabilities and thereby improve their security positions. But when precisely will states do so?

The most parsimonious explanation is balance-of-power theory (Waltz 1979: 117-23). It posits that states form alliances to balance the power of other states, especially when they are unable to balance power through their individual efforts or when the costs of such internal balancing exceed those of alliance membership. From this perspective, unbalanced power alone represents a threat to the survival of less powerful states. Therefore, two or more relatively weak states, when confronted with a much more powerful state, will ally.³

Clearly, balance-of-power theory can also serve as a theory of alliance persistence and disintegration. In this case, shifts in the international distribution of power may threaten the existence of established alliances. For example, the previously predominant state may decline, to the point where an alliance of other states is no longer required to balance its power. Indeed, with the passage of time, an alliance member may become the most powerful state, prompting its erstwhile allies to cut their ties and perhaps even to form counterbalancing alliances against it.

An important refinement of balance-of-power theory is balance-of-threat theory. Sometimes, alliances appear to be unbalanced in terms of power. For example, during much of the Cold War, the alliances centered on the United States were more powerful, as measured on a number of indices of capability, than those revolving around the Soviet Union. Walt addressed such apparent anomalies by arguing that states form alliances in response to common threats, not just power. Although aggregate power is an important component of threat, it is not the only one. How threatening a particular state appears is also a function of its geographical proximity, its offensive capabilities, and the aggressiveness of its intentions. Thus the Soviet Union, by virtue of its relative proximity, its massive ground forces, and its hostile ideology, seemed to pose much more of a threat to its strong but less powerful neighbours, such as France, West Germany, Japan, and Britain, who chose to ally instead with the United States (Walt

1985, 1987).

By the same token, balance-of-threat theory should also illuminate the question of alliance durability and collapse. A decline in the magnitude of the threat posed by an adversary will cause an alliance to weaken or dissolve. This may happen, moreover, even in the absence of any shift in overall power, if, for example, an adversary significantly mutes its offensive military capabilities or seems to moderate its intentions.

Some scholars have noted that states may also use alliances to manage, constrain, and control their partners (Osgood 1968, Schroeder 1976, Weitsman 2004). Obviously, this function is contingent upon the existence of some external balancing purpose; otherwise, we could not speak of the arrangement as an alliance. But assuming that the condition of a more powerful or threatening third party is met, this function can nevertheless be an important, albeit secondary, one. Although this perspective may not be especially helpful for explaining alliance formation, it may shed additional light on the dynamics of alliance disintegration. In this case, if the ally that the alliance is intended, at least in part, to contain becomes too threatening or too powerful to manage successfully, then the alliance will not long survive.

2. Domestic Determinants

Balance-of-power theory may be excessively crude as an explanation of alliance formation, persistence, and collapse. In contrast, balance-of-threat theory represents a more nuanced approach, but this refinement comes at the cost of other analytical problems. After all, is it always so obvious which state will be viewed as a threat by others? In particular, when will a state be regarded as harboring aggressive intentions? Threat perception may depend as much, if not more, on the internal characteristics of states, a subject to which we now turn.

Fortunately, scholars have been equally productive at identifying possible domestic determinants of alliance formation. One set of explanations focuses on similarities and differences in the culture, ideologies, and political institutions of states. The general argument is that, other things being equal, states will tend to ally with states whose political orientations are similar to their own (e.g. Walt 1987). Thus conservative

monarchies will prefer alliances with other monarchies, dictatorships with dictatorships, liberal democracies with liberal democracies, and so on.

Scholars have advanced several interrelated reasons for this tendency. Similar value systems may generate common interests and common interpretations of what constitutes a threat. In the case of states sharing a formal ideology, such as Marxism-Leninism, they may even be operating under an explicit injunction to join forces in the face of a hostile international environment. Not least important, forming an alliance with like-minded states may enhance the domestic legitimacy of a weak regime by suggesting that it is part of a broader, popular movement (Walt 1987: 34-35).

Such arguments also suggest possible causes of alliance disintegration. Most obviously, a sudden regime change in one partner or another as the result of a revolution, coup, or other internal upheaval will immediately loosen the bonds of affinity that held the alliance together. Even more gradual changes in political outlook can have the same effect over a longer period. And in some cases, tensions may arise even among states with a common ideology, since it may dictate that national interests must be subordinated to a single authoritative leadership (Walt 1987: 35-36).

In view of such considerations, scholars have suggested that alliances among liberal democratic states are likely to be especially strong and resilient (Gaubatz 1996). One reason is the relative stability of public preferences and the greater continuity of national leadership. Although different administrations may come and go, the democratic process ensures that leadership transitions occur smoothly and abrupt shifts are unlikely. In addition, the international commitments associated with alliances become more deeply embedded in domestic law and institutions. That tendency, combined with a more general respect for legal commitments, enhances the ability of leaders in liberal democracies to tie the hands of their successors.

Alliance Institutionalization and Socialization

Thus far, the discussion has been limited to explanations of alliance formation that may also shed light on the question of alliance duration. Despite their differences, these theories have in common the idea that when the conditions that promoted the creation of an alliance are no longer present, we should expect the alliance to dissolve. There is,

however, another set of factors and processes that can promote alliance persistence even in the face of significant changes in those formative conditions.

1. Institutionalization

One of these is alliance institutionalization. Some alliances are endowed with important institutional characteristics from the outset, and some may become increasingly institutionalized over time, with important implications for their staying power. Two particular dimensions of alliance institutionalization stand out.

First, alliances may include or develop intergovernmental organizations to facilitate cooperation among their members. These organizations often include a formal bureaucracy with a staff, budget, and physical location. Although presumably of use to the alliance members, such bureaucracies are also actors in their own right with some degree of autonomy and an inherent interest in perpetuating themselves (Walt 1997, Bennett 1997). As Robert McCalla (1996) has noted, such actors can engage in various types of behavior to ensure the organization's survival. For example, they can actively resist change. They can affirm the necessity of the organization. And they can try to manage change by promoting modifications in the alliance's roles and missions that will maintain member state support while not threatening the organization's core functions.

Second, alliances may contain or acquire institutional capabilities that can be used for tasks beyond those for which they were originally designed (Walt 1997, Wallander 2000). Thus even when an alliance's original *raison d'être* fades, member states may find that they can readily employ such institutional assets to address new threats and security concerns. This tendency will be especially pronounced when states are risk averse or the costs of maintaining pre-existing capabilities are clearly less than those of creating new ones from scratch.

The overall implication of such reasoning is that alliances characterized by high levels of institutionalization will last longer on average. Of course, some scholars may reply that the level of institutionalization of an alliance is itself a function of other determinants of alliance formation and persistence. For example, states facing particularly acute threats may choose to create especially capable alliance

organizations, or liberal democracies may find it easier to establish and abide by the additional constraints associated with alliance institutions. Once established, however, such alliance institutions may assume a life of their own and exert an independent impact on subsequent member behavior. Their consequences cannot simply be reduced to the influence of other factors.

In fact, there has been considerable variation in the initial level of institutionalization of alliances. Of the agreements establishing the 263 defensive alliances in the ATOP data set, 70 have contained a named organization with regularly scheduled meetings or a stand-alone organization with a permanent bureaucracy. 28 agreements provided for an integrated military command among the allies. And 63 have called for official contact among national militaries during peacetime or committed the members to conducting a common defence policy.

Moreover, the initial degree of alliance institutionalization has tended to increase over time, suggesting a possible explanation of the greater longevity of more recently formed alliances. Although some 150 (57 percent) of the 263 defensive alliances were established after World War II, 36 (88 percent) of the 41 with a permanent bureaucracy date from the postwar era, as do 21 (75 percent) of those providing for an integrated military command and 49 (78 percent) of those calling for close military contacts. Nevertheless, such indices of institutionalization leave much to be desired, as they do not directly measure organizational autonomy or the fungibility of institutional assets. Moreover, the existing data do not yet capture changes in the level of institutionalization that may occur after the alliance is established.

2. Socialization

Another process that can promote alliance longevity is the socialization of member states, or more precisely, of their political elites and possibly their general publics. Alliance-related social interactions can lead to the development of more similar world views and even a common identity. Thus, as Walt has noted, an alliance may persist because its members come to see themselves as integral parts of a larger political community (1997: 168).

Scholars have lamented that the processes of socialization in international relations are

undertheorized and poorly understood (Johnston 2001, Checkel 2005). Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a number of mechanisms through which alliances might promote the socialization of their members, both directly and indirectly. For example, institutionalized alliances may facilitate substantial contact among elites through regular meetings. Within formal organizational structures, both civilian and military personnel seconded from member governments will often work side-by-side with their counterparts from other countries. And, similar to the organizational arguments presented above, international civil servants may actively seek to cultivate a sense of community among elites and attentive publics through their pronouncements and lobbying activities.

Socialization need not be limited to highly institutionalized alliances, however. The existence of even a weakly institutionalized alliance between two states may reinforce or lead to other connections between the members that facilitate socialization. Because allied states have less to fear from one another than from third parties, other things being equal, they may be more likely to engage in trade and to be receptive to the exchange of capital, technology, information, ideas, and people. And as the eminent political scientist Karl Deutsch (1957) argued more than five decades ago, it is through such mundane material and ideational flows that political communities may be forged.

The Case of NATO After the Cold War

What light does alliance theory shed on the important case of NATO? And what can an examination of NATO after the Cold War contribute to alliance theory?

Background: NATO's Origins and Evolution During the Cold War

NATO, along with a handful of other alliances formed in the years immediately following World War II, is one of the longest-lived alliances. It dates back to April 1949, when the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington, D.C., and ratified by the 12 original members. Although the treaty does not refer to any particular adversary, it was clearly a response to the growing threat that appeared to be posed by the hostile ideology and military power of the Soviet Union. At the same time, at least some members also viewed the alliance as an insurance policy, provided primarily by the United States, against the then admittedly distant prospect of a resurgent Germany. As

NATO's first Secretary General, Lord Hastings Ismay, reportedly remarked, the purpose of the alliance was three-fold: to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.

The alliance's initial organizational expression was extremely modest. The treaty called for only a Council and a defence committee. In contrast, the Brussels Treaty Organization, founded a year early, had a much more elaborate organization, including a military command structure and regional planning groups. And so things remained until mid-1950, when the Korean War abruptly altered Western attitudes about the imminence of the military threat.

In response, the members quickly put the "O" in NATO. They established a council of representatives in permanent session in Paris and, over time, an increasingly complex intergovernmental apparatus for consultation and joint decision-making. They created an international staff, headed by a secretary general, to serve the council. And, not least important, they set up a Military Committee and an elaborate integrated military planning and command structure, the most prominent officer of which would be the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

This is not the place to go into detail about the first four decades of NATO's history. Suffice it to say that the alliance suffered its share of internal stresses and strains. Indeed, disagreement on one important matter or another was a nearly constant theme (e.g. Osgood 1962, Daalder 1991, Duffield 1995). There were intense debates on such questions as how much emphasis to place on nuclear versus conventional weapons in NATO's military strategy, how many conventional forces each member should provide, and whether and how to modernized the alliance's nuclear arsenal. And in the 1960s, France withdrew from the alliance's military structures, precipitating the sudden transfer of NATO's civilian and military headquarters to new quarters in Belgium.

What appears most important in retrospect, however, is that the alliance survived the many challenges to its internal cohesion that arose during those decades and even outlasted the Soviet Union itself. Indeed, NATO's persistence during the Cold War is rarely, if ever, discussed, perhaps because it has subsequently seemed inevitable. After all, the Soviet Union continued to pose a serious political-military threat to the

alliance's members, and, secondarily, NATO proved to be an effective vehicle for harnessing West Germany's tremendous military potential without recreating destabilizing security dilemmas in western Europe.

The Puzzle of NATO's Post-Cold War Persistence

Instead, what has seemed most puzzling and, as a result, has been the object of considerable inquiry has been NATO's survival after the Cold War. Even before the disintegration of the Soviet Union and especially thereafter, some International Relations scholars argued that the alliance's days, or at least its years, were numbered and that it would sooner or later fall apart (e.g. Mearsheimer 1990, Waltz 1993). The principal argument offered was the absence of a compelling external threat. With the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union, the NATO members would no longer see any imperative to maintain the alliance, and it would soon lapse into ineffectuality, even if it continued to exist on paper. Later in the 1990s, Walt offered the more general argument that alliances will tend to be less robust in a multipolar world because major powers will possess more options as their numbers increase (1997: 163). Thus, he concluded, 'prudence suggests that existing alliance commitments can no longer be taken for granted' (1997: 164).

These predictions proved, at a minimum, to be premature. Rather than go out of business, NATO has, at least in some ways, thrived since 1990. It has added 12 new members, nearly doubling in size. Forces under NATO command have engaged in extensive combat operations in places such as Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya. Indeed, the core operational element of the treaty, Article V, which obligates members to provide assistance should one or more of them be the object of an armed attack, was invoked for the first time, following the terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001. All in all, NATO has exhibited what might be regarded as a surprising degree of durability and robustness.

Explaining NATO's Persistence

Can NATO's post-Cold War persistence be accounted for in terms of the existing explanations of alliance persistence identified above? Are there any aspects of the alliance's recent history that do not fit these theories? What other explanations can be adduced to account for these anomalies?

Before proceeding, there is one methodological issue that should be aired. Some of the explanations of alliance persistence have in fact been developed with the case of NATO after the Cold War in mind. Since the goal of this chapter is not to test theories but rather to use them to illuminate a particular instance, this circularity poses no troubling methodological problems. But it does, at a minimum, raise the question of whether such explanations are in fact likely to find applications elsewhere, even though their underlying logic may be sound.

Some might argue that there is no puzzle to be explained because NATO is no longer an alliance. Rather, it has been transformed into something else, perhaps a regional collective security arrangement or what Wallander and Keohane (1999) have called a security management institution. Such an argument, however, would still beg the question of how and why NATO was able to perform this feat of re-inventing itself.

The first place to turn for answers is the explanations that emphasize the international determinants of alliance persistence. Here we might note three principal reasons for NATO's longevity. One is the residual threat posed by the remnants of the Soviet Union, notably Russia. Although greatly diminished in power and geographically separated from NATO Europe by an additional layer of buffer states, Russia nevertheless continued to possess a military capability second to none on the continent and by far the most lethal nuclear arsenal. Compounding this enduring disparity in raw capabilities has been much uncertainty about Russia's future intentions. Russia's experiment with democracy was troubled from the outset, and recent years have been marked by renewed efforts by Russia to assert itself, sometimes by coercive means, on the world stage.

A second external factor was the emergence of new threats that were largely shared by NATO members. The first to emerge, even before the Cold War was officially interred, was instability and bloody civil conflicts on or near NATO's borders, especially in the Balkans. Apart from the humanitarian imperatives that such conflicts generated, some had the potential to spill over into or draw in neighbouring states, raising the possibility of a wider conflagration. Concern about regional conflicts was followed by the growing threat of international terrorism. To be sure, NATO as an organization has thus far

played a relatively minor role in the overall efforts of its members, chiefly the United States, to combat terrorists (de Nevers 2007). Nevertheless, it has made important contributions, most notably its assumption of the command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in 2003.

Not to be overlooked is the continuing intra-alliance function that NATO has played in ensuring friendly relations among its members. Certainly, this function is less important than it was during the early years of the Cold War, when memories of World War II were still fresh, and it has been increasingly assumed by the European Union. Still, NATO's post-Cold War role in this regard has not been insignificant, especially its role in allaying potential concerns about a unified Germany. By increasing transparency, further denationalizing security policies, and subtly balancing power, the alliance has helped to assure its members that they have nothing to fear from one another (Duffield 1994/95). German leaders in particular have recognized the value of maintaining NATO as a vital organization for the purpose of reassuring its neighbours (Duffield 1998).

What about NATO's institutionalization and the socialization of its members over time? Clearly, NATO has acquired a substantial organizational structure. Overall, more than 5,000 civilians work for NATO, with 1,200 of them concentrated in an International Staff at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels. There is little evidence to suggest, however, that this bureaucracy has exercised much influence over the relevant actions of the member countries (McCalla 1996). Although the secretary general and his staff have sometimes played a critical role in facilitating cooperation among the members (Hendrickson 2006), the key decisions concerning the perpetuation of the alliance since the end of the Cold War have been consistent with pre-existing national interests and priorities.

Arguably more important in explaining NATO's persistence has been the fungibility of its institutional assets (Wallander 2000). In addition to the civilian bureaucracy, NATO had developed an elaborate integrated military planning and command structure and associated joint military assets, which made it unique among peacetime alliances. Although these assets were developed with Cold War challenges and contingencies in mind, they have proved to be remarkably adaptable to the new threat environment. In

particular, they have enabled NATO and its members to take a number of actions, such as the operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya, that other alliances or ad hoc groupings would have found difficult, if not impossible, to mount. Here, however, we must acknowledge a close, if not symbiotic, relationship between the emergence of new threats and NATO's institutional ability to deal with them. Neither factor by itself would have provided a sufficient rationale for maintaining the alliance.

Finally, we turn to the question of socialization within NATO. This is perhaps the most difficult explanation to evaluate. There is some evidence that the views of government officials and military commanders have been altered by their close association with alliance counterparts (Tuschhoff 1999). It is not clear, however, how extensive or consequential such changes may have been. Certainly, it would be difficult to conclude that interpersonal intra-alliance interactions have altered national identities or world views in ways that can be said to have had a measurable impact on national policies toward NATO since the end of the Cold War. Perhaps more important have been the broader contacts, especially those of a transatlantic nature, that have been facilitated and nurtured by the existence of NATO over the years. The substantial movement of goods, investments, ideas, and people has created close societal ties between the two sides of the Atlantic. But here, too, it would be nigh impossible to draw a direct link between them and NATO's persistence.

Of course, numerous though they be, the above explanations do not exhaust the possibilities. Thus before concluding, it is worth considering some additional reasons that may be unique to the case of NATO and thus impossible to generalize to other alliances. One is NATO's utility as a tool for political reform. Since the breakup of the Soviet empire, NATO countries have employed the prospect of membership to promote liberal democratic practices and institutions, such as civilian control of the military and transparency in defense budgets, in the countries of central, eastern, and southeastern Europe (Gheciu 2005). Although these efforts can be viewed as part of the alliance's overall strategy for enhancing the security of its members, they constitute an unconventional approach by historical standards, to say the least.

Another reason for NATO's longevity may be its usefulness as an enforcement arm of the UN Security Council. During the Cold War, the two security organizations had little

or nothing to do with one another, and it took the trauma of the conflict in Bosnia to prompt the first halting steps toward coordination. Now, however, NATO has a long track record of enforcing Security Council resolutions. To be sure, the member countries have used the alliance in this way only where doing so served their interests, but these interests may be increasingly broadly defined, as suggested by the assistance that the alliance has provided in situations as geographically remote or as unrelated to traditional security concerns as Darfur, Libya, and the Gulf of Aden.

Conclusion: Alliance Theory and the Future of NATO

The above analysis, despite its necessary brevity, suggests the usefulness of alliance theory for illuminating the reasons for NATO's persistence after the Cold War and, more generally, for understanding international relations. Indeed, alliance theory may be too useful, insofar as the case of NATO tends to affirm the utility of multiple approaches. Typically, social scientists search for cases that will differentiate more decisively among alternative theories on the basis of their explanatory power. But that was not the goal of this chapter. Rather, the NATO case was chosen because of its practical importance in a world where significant threats to the security of states still exist. Whether or not one can draw broader conclusions about the conditions influencing the longevity of alliances is beside the point. Indeed, given the many unusual, if not unique, features of NATO, any attempts to generalize are likely to be misleading.

Instead, we might content ourselves by concluding with some discussion of what alliance theory can say about the future of NATO. Here, the theory is less useful, although no less useful than other theories when it comes to prognostication. Perhaps the best that it can do is to draw attention to the types of factors that are likely to be determinative, even if no particular weights or probabilities can be attached to them. Among the most important will be the presence or absence of threats that are sufficiently shared and intense so as to cause the NATO countries to continue to see value in addressing those threats in a collective manner. Closely related will be the ability to adapt NATO's institutions, especially in ways that are less costly than institutional alternatives, so that they can continue to address the evolving spectrum of threats.

From this perspective, NATO faces at least two significant challenges. One is a growing divergence in the principal security concerns facing NATO members. This divergence is partly a result of the alliance's successful expansion after the Cold War, which necessarily widened the range of concerns. While older members may especially value NATO for its role in promoting stability beyond the alliance's borders, some of the newer members may view it primarily as a means of providing security in the face of a potentially revanchist Russia. Although these varying motives for maintaining NATO may complement one another, they can nevertheless generate strains when it comes to establishing alliance priorities and deciding on concrete courses of action. Further complicating matters is the emergence of new threats that may not always, or even often, be best addressed through NATO. Most obvious here is the challenge posed by international terrorism, which has prompted rather divergent responses among the members of the alliance.

The other challenge is the existence of promising institutional alternatives, especially for the European members of NATO. Since the early 1990s, the European Union (EU) has made great strides toward the development of common policies and policy-making structures in the areas of foreign, security, and even defence policy. Thus far, the leaders of NATO and EU countries (many of whom are one and the same) have succeeded in ensuring that the two sets of institutions and their activities remain compatible with one another. But in view of the many tensions that have roiled transatlantic relations in recent years, it is not difficult to imagine circumstances in which European leaders would decide to assign clear priority to the use of EU structures, calling into question the preservation of NATO in anything like its present form.

Further Reading

The best recent overview of the subject of alliances is Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

The two most thorough examinations of alliance formation and persistence are Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), and Patricia A. Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace*,

Weapons of War (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

The most comprehensive study of NATO's persistence is Wallace J. Thies, *Why NATO Endures* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Perhaps the most authoritative and up-to-date history of NATO is Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United: The Evolution of an Alliance* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

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¹ The ATOP data are available at <http://atop.rice.edu/>.

² The mean duration of the 14 purely offensive alliances was 4.4 years, with a standard deviation of 6.5 years.

³ An important exception to this general rule may occur when one state becomes so powerful that no combination of other states can balance its power. In that case, other states may choose to 'bandwagon' with the predominant state (Waltz 1979: 126).