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# Measuring alliance reliability

– current practices and future research

Sunniva Mowatt Storm



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## Summary

Defensive alliances commit states to aid each other in the event of conflict. Their goal is often twofold: to increase the ability to deter armed conflicts with an adversary and to increase the probability of prevailing in conflict should deterrence fail. Thus, the prospects of allied support in the event of war constitute a cornerstone in defense planning for states across the globe. Yet, not all alliances are honored. In fact, recent empirical studies of alliance reliability, testing how often alliance commitments are honored, conclude with a low fulfillment rate.

After the Second World War, the U.S. entered into a range of alliances. A recent study has found that in this same period, the U.S. did not fulfill any of its alliance commitments. This is remarkable not only because so many states depend on the U.S. as an ally, but because it seems incompatible with the fact that most U.S. alliances have endured throughout the period.

This report explores this puzzle by revisiting the assumptions of the prevailing research design in the literature on alliance reliability. It explores four such assumptions and applies them to the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis as an illustrative example of the restrictions within the prevailing approach in the alliance reliability literature and the implications for future research. It finds that while existing research has produced invaluable contributions to our understanding of alliance dynamics, the research design is restricted in scope, including only certain alliances, and producing results that may not be precise. In the case of the U.S., which is the focus of this report, the method and operationalization used to assess alliance reliability are particularly unsuited. Specifically, only alliances confronted by interstate war are tested, despite interstate wars occurring relatively infrequently after 1945. This leads to a small and skewed sample of alliances being 'put to the test', as alliances that successfully deter conflicts from occurring in the first place are not included in the sample. Moreover, the language and context of each individual treaty are seldom taken sufficiently into account in big data research. Lastly, the operationalization of alliance fulfillment requires a state to enter into war alongside its ally. Such a dichotomous definition of allied support disregards military contributions beneath the conflict threshold.

This report suggests that alliances may be more reliable than previous research would allow. Much in the same way as related concepts like deterrence, alliance reliability is a complex phenomenon, difficult to measure. In studying alliance reliability, we should take into account each treaty's language and provisions, the allied relation in question, and the context of the conflict. Thus, there is a need for a broader concept of alliance reliability. In sum, we should be careful drawing generalizations about alliance reliability from existing big data research, and rather apply this research as a fruitful foundation for future case-by-case studies.

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## Sammendrag

Forsvarsallianser forplikter stater til å støtte hverandre i konflikter. Formålet er gjerne todelt. Alliansen skal øke evnen til å avskrekke væpnet konflikt og øke sjansen til å lykkes i konflikt dersom avskrekking feiler. Forventningen om alliert støtte i konflikt er derfor en bærebjelke i forsvarsplanlegging i stater verden over. Samtidig blir ikke alle allianser innfridd. Nylig forskning på alliansereliasibilitet konkluderer med at allianser ofte ikke innfris.

I perioden etter Andre verdenskrig gikk USA inn i en rekke allianser. Nylig forskning på alliansereliasibilitet impliserer at USA i denne samme perioden ikke innfridde noen av allianseforpliktelsene sine. Dette er påfallende ikke kun fordi så mange stater avhenger av amerikanske sikkerhetsgarantier, men fordi det intuitivt virker å gå på akkord med det faktum at de fleste av USAs allianseforpliktelser har vedvart.

Denne rapporten undersøker fire sentrale antakelser i den rådende forskningslitteraturen om alliansereliasibilitet. Antakelsene avendes på Den andre krisen over Taiwan-stredet. Dette er et illustrerende eksempel på begrensningene i rådende forskningspraksiser. Her finnes også implikasjoner for videre forskning.

Undersøkelsen finner at tidligere forskning har produsert uvurderlige bidrag til vår forståelse for alliansedynamikk. Samtidig er forskningsdesignet svært begrenset i omfang. Den benytter seg av snevre definisjoner av eksempelvis alliert støtte, inkluderer kun visse typer allianse, og gir dermed resultater som kan være upresise. Eksempelvis måles kun allianser som konfronteres med mellomstatlig krig, til tross for at denne typen krig er mindre vanlig etter 1945. Dette fører til et lite og skjevt utvalg av allianser, da de alliansene som evner å avskrekke konflikt ikke blir testet. Videre blir teksten i- og konteksten rundt hver enkelt allianse sjelden tatt hensyn til i tilstrekkelig grad. Operasjonaliseringen av allianseinnfrielse krever at en stat går inn i krig ved sin alliertes side. En slik todelt behandling av alliert støtte utelater militær og ikke-militær støtte under terskelen av å bli part i krigen.

Funnene i denne rapporten impliserer at allianser kan være mer reliable enn det nylig forskning tilsier. Alliansereliasibilitet er, i likhet med relaterte begreper som avskrekking, et komplekst fenomen som er vanskelig å måle. Særlig gjelder dette når det ikke tas høyde for alliansetekst- og forbehold, den allierte relasjonen og konfliktens kontekst. Dette viser behovet for en bredere forståelse av alliansereliasibilitet. Alt i alt bør vi være forsiktige med å trekke generaliseringer fra stordataforskning på fenomenet. Snarere bør vi anvende denne forskningen som et fruktbart grunnlag for dybdestudier av hver allianse.

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## Preface

This report is the result of the author's internship at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI) during the summer of 2022. The internship was part of the project *Globale trender*, its motivation being increased insight into matters of allied support, with a particular focus on U.S. alliance policy. FFI researcher Vårin Alme contributed to the report as the author's supervisor.

Oslo, 20 March 2023  
Sunniva Mowatt Storm

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# 1 Introduction

The prospects of allied support in the event of an armed attack constitute the cornerstone in defense planning for states across the globe. Yet, empirical studies of alliance reliability after 1945 conclude with a surprisingly low fulfillment rate for alliances.<sup>1</sup> When the scope is limited to U.S. alliance fulfillment, the data demonstrate an even more discouraging conclusion: that the U.S. has not fulfilled *any* alliance commitments after 1945.<sup>2</sup> The implication is that the U.S. constitutes an entirely unreliable alliance partner. This is remarkable not only because so many states, including Norway, depend on U.S. security guarantees,<sup>3</sup> but also because it appears to contradict the fact that U.S. alliances in this period have mostly endured, and that U.S. alliance commitments seem to have been dependable, for instance in the case of NATO.<sup>4</sup>

To unwind this puzzle, this report assesses the assumptions undergirding the alliance reliability research and finds that while this research is invaluable to our understanding of alliance dynamics in international relations, the method used is restrictive and narrow, which can render results imprecise. By reassessing the assumptions and measurements in the alliance reliability literature this report suggests that alliances may be more reliable than previous research would imply. To gain a more precise understanding of alliance reliability in general and U.S. alliance reliability in particular, we should supplement the data found in big data research like that presented by Berkemeier and Fuhrmann with in-depth case studies. These case studies should take into account the specific language and provisions of the treaty text – not merely categorize the types of alliance commitments – as well as the allied relation in question and the context of the conflict. We should also loosen the definition of allied support to include support beyond military aid and beyond partaking in war. Further, we should abandon the strict selection criteria of “alliance performance opportunities” – events where alliance commitments are deemed as activated, for instance by one state being attacked by another. This criterion results in the testing of alliances that are confronted with war, not alliances that successfully deter war. Applying a more holistic approach and a wider understanding of allied support and alliance reliability can increase our insight into an important security issue in our time.

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 outlines central concepts in the existing research, such as “alliance,” alliance reliability,” “alliance performance opportunity,” and “allied support.” Chapter 3 presents the method and data utilized in the report, mostly focusing on the research presented by Leeds et.al and Berkemeier and Fuhrmann. The fourth chapter consists of a critical assessment of the methodological approach employed in the alliance reliability literature. To underscore the difficulties in drawing conclusions on alliance fulfillment, one specific U.S. alliance performance opportunity, The Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, is studied

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1 Berkemeier and Fuhrmann, "Reassessing the Fulfillment of Alliance Commitments in War" and Sabrosky, "Interstate alliances" find that alliances were honored in 50 and 20 percent of cases, respectively, when examining all types of alliances i.e. not delimited to defense alliances.

2 Fuhrmann, "Replication Data for Reassessing the Fulfillment of Alliance Commitments in War."

3 Leeds et al., "Reevaluating Alliance Reliability", 687; Prop. 14 S (2020–2021), 13.

4 Beckley, "The Myth of Entangling Alliances", 18-19. Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 169.

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more closely in chapter five. This includes a discussion of the exact U.S. alliance obligations and whether it is reasonable to classify the alliance as violated. In the last chapter, the insights from the analysis are summarized to suggest improvements to the conceptualization of alliance reliability.

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## 2 The literature on alliance reliability: Central concepts, assumptions, and findings

### 2.1 Alliances

Glenn Snyder's definition of alliances remains a point of reference in International Relations (IR) alliance literature. Alliances are defined by Snyder as "formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership."<sup>5</sup> By including a requirement of formality, Snyder makes an important distinction between alliances and alignments. While alliances are a subset type of alignment, the former are formalized, explicit, and legally binding agreements that usually take the form of a treaty. The difference between alliances and alignments lies in the degree of specificity and the level of legal and moral obligations included.<sup>6</sup>

Most often, it is assumed that the formality of alliances entails greater costs on its members than alignments, such as loss of autonomy, costs of integration, and potential reputational loss in case of non-compliance, and that these costs augment the credibility of the promises in the alliance treaty.<sup>7</sup>

While Snyder's definition of alliances is a good point of departure, it might be too narrow for the strategic context after World War II. Alliances in the modern era are increasingly characterized by more blanket commitments and less specificity. Further, contemporary alliances are rarely directed towards one specific adversary, at least not in explicit terms.<sup>8</sup> Leeds et al. provide a definition that is more applicable to the post-World War II context. This definition is also utilized by Berkemeier and Fuhrmann, whose study of alliance reliability after 1945 forms the outset for this report.

An alliance is a written agreement, signed by official representatives of at least two independent states, that includes promises to aid a partner in the event of military conflict, remain neutral in the event of conflict, refrain from military conflict with one another, or consult/cooperate in the event of international crises that create a potential for military conflict.<sup>9</sup>

This definition envisions different types of alliance commitments. The focus of this report is limited to defense alliances. The term defense alliance is employed to signify formal alliances, as defined by Leeds et al. and reiterated in the previous paragraph, containing "promises to assist an ally militarily in the event of attack on the ally's sovereignty or territorial integrity."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Gartzke and Gleditsch, "Why Democracies May Actually Be Less Reliable Allies", 780.

<sup>8</sup> Leeds and Mattes, "Alliance Politics during the Cold War".

<sup>9</sup> Leeds et al., "Reevaluating Alliance Reliability", 690.

<sup>10</sup> Leeds, "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) Codebook", 11.

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## 2.2 Alliance reliability and alliance performance opportunities

The alliance reliability literature originates in the studies of Sabrosky and Siverson & King in the 1980s.<sup>11</sup> These first empirical statistical studies endeavored to measure alliance reliability by examining whether states joined their allies in war, i.e. wartime reliability. The unit of observation in this literature is ‘alliance performance opportunity’, meaning instances where an alliance is confronted with war. The results in these early empirical studies are gloomy, as alliances were deemed honored in only 27% and 23% of the cases, respectively.<sup>12</sup>

In a seminal article, Leeds et al. sought to nuance the findings in the early literature by distinguishing between different types of alliance obligations.<sup>13</sup> They stress that some alliances merely contain consultation, neutrality, or non-aggression obligations, without binding the parties to defend one another in war. Leeds et al. argue that only alliances with defense-, offense- or non-aggression provisions should be included when determining alliance reliability.

This can, however, as Leeds et al., also point out, lead to selection bias.<sup>14</sup> Several alternative measures of reliability have been proposed. Some authors, like Gaubatz, focus on the duration of alliances. Others, like Kuo, suggest using the level of internal cohesion as an alternative measure of alliance reliability that is not conditioned on the occurrence of war.<sup>15</sup> Although delimiting reliability to wartime reliability is problematic, important insights are gained in studying alliance behavior in cases of conflict. Thus, this report argues that what we should revise is the understanding of what constitutes instances of reliability. This report revisits the ‘alliance performance’ assumption of the reliability literature and endeavors to show how this assumption should be loosened and its results supplemented with in-depth contextual case studies.

## 2.3 Casus foederis and allied support

Leeds et al. underscore the importance of establishing the specific commitments and provisions of the alliance text in order to get a precise image of when alliance commitments come into effect and when they do not – in other words, what constitutes *casus foederis* – an activation of the terms stipulated in the alliance text. They propose a more context-specific way of measuring alliance reliability where allied support must be measured according to the specific alliance promises, not merely by the question of whether or not the state joined their ally in war.

Casus foederis may include particular types of attacks, geographic zones, adversaries, etc. Importantly, if a state is party to a conflict beyond the scope of an alliance agreement, casus

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<sup>11</sup> Sabrosky, “Interstate alliances”; Siverson, Randolph M., and Joel King. “Attributes of national alliance membership and war participation, 1815-1965.” *American Journal of Political Science* 24, no 1. (1980): 1-15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Leeds et al., “Reevaluating Alliance Reliability”, 688.

<sup>15</sup> Gaubatz, “Democratic States and Commitment in International Relations.” Kuo, “Measurement Choice and Alliance Reliability.”

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foederis is not met. In this case, allied states cannot be expected to come to their defense, and their failure to do so should not be treated as a violation of the alliance commitments.<sup>16</sup>

The U.S. defense obligations in The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) may serve as an example of no casus foederis. The SEATO treaty explicitly stated that U.S. defense obligations in the alliance were limited to the event of communist aggression.<sup>17</sup> When Pakistan, which was also party to SEATO, was attacked by India in the Bangladesh Independence War of 1971, the U.S., therefore, held no obligation to defend Pakistan based on the provisions of SEATO.<sup>18</sup>

Leeds et al. made an important contribution to the alliance reliability literature by emphasizing the importance of considering both the type of alliance obligation and the specification of casus foederis in the individual treaty text. After making these delimitations, Leeds et al. estimated a significantly higher alliance fulfillment rate than in the early literature. They found that 74.5 percent of alliances were honored between 1816 and 1945 when including defense, offense, and non-aggression pacts.<sup>19</sup>

In another important scholarly contribution, Berkemeier and Fuhrmann adopted the approach from Leeds et al. but extended the time frame from 1816 to 2003.<sup>20</sup> By including the period after 1945, Berkemeier and Fuhrmann found that alliance commitments were fulfilled only 50 percent of the time. Meanwhile, the fulfillment rate for defense alliances was merely 41.18 percent. Berkemeier and Fuhrmann thereby provided significant insight into the alliance reliability literature, as their study appears to be one of few empirical estimates of alliance reliability for the period after 1945.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, to the best of the author's knowledge, the only other available study for the period after 1945 is the previously cited study by Sabrosky, which includes an estimate from 1816 to 1965.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 692.

<sup>17</sup> "Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty." *UNTS* Vol. 248, No. 3496: 214-225.

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20209/volume-209-i-2819-english.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> As will be noted later, the U.S. was however committed to the defense of Pakistan in the same conflict through the 1959 bilateral 'Agreement of cooperation'.

<sup>19</sup> Leeds et al., "Reevaluating Alliance Reliability".

<sup>20</sup> Berkemeier and Fuhrmann, "Reassessing the Fulfillment of Alliance Commitments in War".

<sup>21</sup> One exception may be Leeds, Brett Ashley, and Jennifer Gigliotti-Labay who performed a similar estimation for the period performed a similar estimation for the period 1816–1991 in "You Can Count on Me? Democracy and Alliance Reliability." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia (2003). However, this paper remains unpublished and is not available online despite the author's best efforts to locate it. Gartzke and Gleditsch do however note that Leeds and Gigliotti-Labay estimate lower alliance reliability for the entire period 1816–1991, as allies merely intervene alongside their partners 52 percent of the time. The substantial decrease compared to the estimate for 1816-1945 indicates that the post-1945 era is characterized by lower alliance compliance.

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## 3 Research design

This report critically reviews the prevailing approach to alliance reliability by examining the operationalization of alliance performance opportunities and comparing it to empirical alliance data, as well as applying it to one case of alliance performance opportunity.

### 3.1 Data

Leeds et al.'s Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions-dataset (ATOP) is well suited for this purpose.<sup>22</sup> ATOP is the most comprehensive dataset of military alliance agreements formed between 1815 and 2018.<sup>23</sup> The data are released in six formats with different units of analysis, and this report employs the alliance-level dataset (atop5\_0a). This dataset contains one entry per alliance and includes a variety of information about each alliance.<sup>24</sup>

As the focus of this report is defense alliances, the dataset is limited to alliances with defense provisions, i.e. “promises to assist an ally militarily in the event of an attack on the ally’s sovereignty or territorial integrity”. In order to make the alliance data comparable with Berkemeier and Fuhrmann’s dataset, this report also limits the timeframe of alliances to those initiated between 1816 and 2003.

The report seeks to identify and remedy deficits in the alliance reliability literature in terms of defense alliances. This means that offense- and non-aggression pacts are excluded from the samples unless they also contain defense commitments. This diverges from Leeds et al.’s sampling choice but reflects that this report has no ambition of making a comparable statistical estimate of overall alliance compliance, but rather seeks to nuance and further develop the analytical approach to defense alliances. The sampling choice also reflects the tendency in the data, as there is only one alliance that does not include a defensive provision among Fuhrmann and Berkemeier’s alliance performance opportunities.<sup>25</sup> This is the World War II offensive pact between the USSR, the UK, and the U.S.

### 3.2 Method

After looking at the alliance datasets and illustrating insights from the data, I employ findings from the alliance literature to explain why the operationalization of alliance reliability produces results that should be supplemented with careful case-by-case investigation. Special attention is put on validity, i.e. the extent to which the operationalization and scoring of cases adequately reflect the concept.<sup>26</sup>

Subsequently, we delve deeper into the empirical data by focusing on U.S. performance opportunities. Initially, all U.S. alliance performance opportunities between 1945 and 2003 are

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<sup>22</sup> Leeds et al., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944.”

<sup>23</sup> Leeds, “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) Codebook”, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>25</sup> See Table A.1.

<sup>26</sup> Adcock and Collier, “Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research”, 529.

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identified by examining all cases of alliance performance opportunity in Berkemeier and Fuhrmann's dataset. I have carefully examined the U.S.' exact alliance obligations in each case to isolate events where the U.S. did not have defense obligations, where there was no *casus foederis*, and/or the U.S. was indeed the party that required allied support. After making these reservations five identified cases of U.S. alliance performance opportunity remain between 1945 and 2003: the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954-55, the Second Taiwan Crisis in 1958, the Bangladesh Independence War in 1971, and the Football War between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969. The latter conflict represents the fourth and fifth alliance performance opportunities, as the U.S. held defense commitments to both warring parties through the OAS and Rio treaties.

Chapter 5 is devoted to a closer analysis of one of the identified U.S. alliance performance opportunities: the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis. This chapter aims to highlight the difficulties in drawing conclusions regarding the exact obligations entailed in an alliance and determining whether these can be considered fulfilled. The procedure mimics Leeds et al.'s research design. First, the U.S. defense obligations towards Taiwan are evaluated. However, instead of focusing on determining whether the alliance contains a defense commitment, the report closely examines the treaty text and supplements this text with other relevant contextual information to evaluate what specific promises were made, and if it is reasonable to interpret this as an obligation for the use of force in war. The contextual information consists of formal statements, acts, reports, and memorandums. Further, the contents of *casus foederis* are considered. Based on this, I endeavor to evaluate to what extent the U.S. alliance obligations were upheld, and in so doing, illustrate the complexities of determining alliance obligations and alliance fulfillment.

Among the five U.S. alliance performances identified from Berkemeier and Fuhrmann's dataset, the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis is a particularly suitable case for this purpose. First, due to the existence of formal defense obligations between the U.S. and the Republic of China (ROC)<sup>27</sup> from the very beginning of the conflict, the case provides a clearer outset for analyzing alliance commitments than in the First Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1954. Second, a recently declassified report provides unique insight into U.S. decision-making and undertakings during the conflict, which enables a thorough evaluation of U.S. contribution and considerations in light of the alliance commitments.<sup>28</sup> Third, the U.S. was only allied with one party of the conflict during the Taiwan Strait Crisis, unlike the case in the Football War in 1969. Analyzing U.S. alliance obligations in the latter case would constitute a complicated endeavor, as the obligation to intervene alongside both states would simultaneously entail violating the same alliance by fighting against an allied partner.

Finally, the vagueness and strategic ambiguity embedded in U.S. alliance commitments towards the ROC means that the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis illustrates especially well the challenge of pinpointing the actual obligations within a defense alliance, and next, whether these commitments can be considered fulfilled. In sum, this makes the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis an

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<sup>27</sup> In this report, ROC and Taiwan are used interchangeably to refer to the Republic of China.

<sup>28</sup> Halperin, Morton H. "The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis: A Documented History."



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illustrative example of the limitations within the prevailing approach in the alliance reliability literature, with important implications for future research.

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## 4 Methodological hurdles in the alliance reliability literature

### 4.1 The prevailing research design

Alliance reliability literature predominantly examines alliance performance opportunities to determine reliability. This is the approach adopted by both Leeds et al. and Berkemeier and Fuhrmann. Both works identify alliance performance opportunities by first examining a list of conflicts to determine whether any of the participating states were members of one or more defense alliances at the time of war. For cases in which a warring state did belong to an alliance, the next step is to determine whether *casus foederis* was invoked. If the alliance commitments are deemed activated, for instance by one state being attacked by another as stipulated in a defense treaty, it constitutes an alliance performance opportunity. Every defense alliance combination where *casus foederis* is invoked is considered a separate case. This means that conflicts that trigger more than one alliance commitment will appear multiple times in the datasets.<sup>29</sup>

Subsequently, each alliance performance opportunity is evaluated to determine whether the alliance commitments are honored or violated. Both Leeds et al. and Berkemeier and Fuhrmann employ the following operationalization of alliance fulfillment:

We consider an alliance commitment honored if (1) an ally fought on the same side with its alliance partner as promised (in a defense and/or offense pact), (2) an ally remained neutral in a conflict as promised, or (3) an ally fought alongside its alliance partner despite promising only neutrality.[...] We coded an alliance commitment as violated if (1) an ally fought against its partner (in the context of a defense, offense, non-aggression, or neutrality pact), or (2) an ally did not come to a partner's aid even though it had promised such assistance in a defense and/or offense pact.<sup>30</sup>

Specifically, Berkemeier and Fuhrmann rely on Reiter et al.'s operationalization of war participation to determine whether a state came to the aid of its ally in a conflict. Reiter defines a state as a participant in war "if it suffers at least 100 battle dead, and/or contributes at least 1000 troops."<sup>31</sup> It is unclear what requirements for war participation Leeds et al. employ, as this is not clearly stated in their manuscript nor their replication data. They do, however, differentiate their coding choices from the COW guidelines, which require 100 fatalities or the engagement of a minimum of 1000 armed personnel in active combat.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Leeds et al., "Reevaluating Alliance Reliability", 689.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 693-694.

<sup>31</sup> Reiter et al., "A deeper look at interstate war data: Interstate War Data version 1.1."

<sup>32</sup> Leeds et al., "Reevaluating Alliance Reliability", 696.

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## 4.2 Challenges and limitations in the prevailing research design

The method of evaluating alliance reliability outlined above presents four restrictions with important implications for the findings. Here I lay them out and discuss possible solutions for future research.

### 4.2.1 Restricting the scope of analysis to cases of interstate war

The first problem is the delimitation of cases exclusively to interstate wars. Alliance performance opportunities, as operationalized by Berkemeier and Fuhrmann, rely on the outbreak of interstate war between COW member states with a minimum of 500 battle-related fatalities within twelve months. This is because the conflict data employed uses this operationalization of conflicts.<sup>33</sup> The approach is not illogical; alliances often aim to regulate and deter precisely interstate war. However, in the modern strategic environment, the frequency of interstate war has been declining.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, other types of conflicts are not considered possible alliance performance opportunities. Importantly, extra-state conflicts (between a non-state actor and a state actor outside of the state's territory) that occur more frequently than interstate wars, and have been increasing considerably in frequency since 1945, are not included.<sup>35</sup> Excluding non-state actors entails disregarding events such as the 9/11 terrorist attack, which remains the only time NATO's Article 5 has been activated. In the case of 9/11, the attack was regarded as *casus foederis* despite being executed by a non-state actor because it i) constituted an armed attack originating from abroad and ii) was directed against one of NATO's member states.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, one of the implications of conditioning alliance performance opportunities on the outbreak of interstate war might be a significantly lower number of alliances being included in the sample after 1945 because of a change in conflict trends which is not accounted for in reliability measurements.<sup>37</sup> Figure 4.1 uses the ATOP data to illustrate the relative increase in alliances containing defense provisions after 1945 by plotting the number of defense alliances initiated by any state per year. The dotted line marks the year 1945.

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<sup>33</sup> Reiter et al., "A deeper look at interstate war data: Interstate War Data version 1.1."

<sup>34</sup> See for instance Human Security Research Group. "The decline in global violence: Evidence, explanation, and contestation – Human security report 2013." Vancouver: Human Security Press, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Davies et al., "Organized Violence 1989–2021 and Drone Warfare."

<sup>36</sup> NATO, "Collective defense - Article 5."

<sup>37</sup> Leeds et al., "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944." Fuhrmann, "Replication Data for Reassessing the Fulfillment of Alliance Commitments in War."

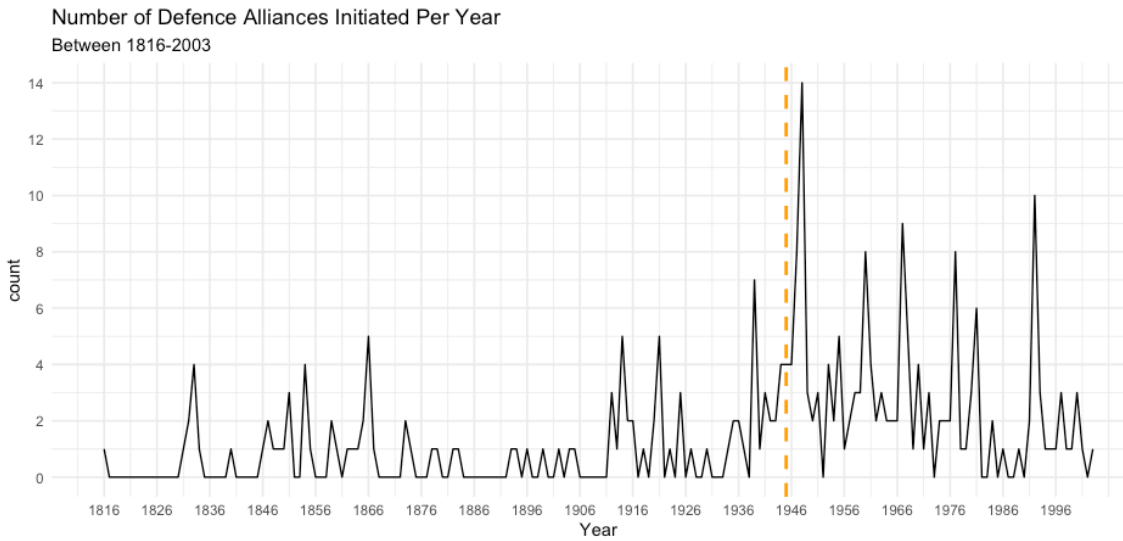


Figure 4.1 Data sourced from Leeds et al., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944.”

The increase becomes even more striking when considering the number of alliances initiated per decade, as illustrated in Figure 4.2. Out of the total 265 defense alliances recorded in ATOP between 1816-2003, 161 were initiated in 1945 or later. This means that 60 percent of all defense alliances recorded were initiated in what Sabrosky calls the “Age of Alliances” after 1945.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Sabrosky, “Interstate Alliances”, 176.

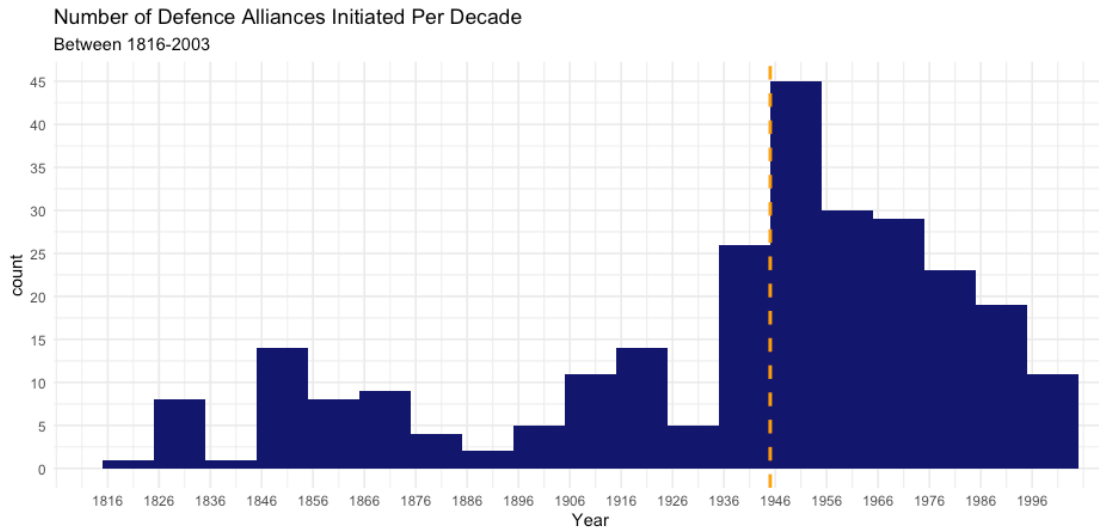


Figure 4.2 Data sourced from Leeds et al., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944.”

Similarly, the number of defense alliances that were active in any given year increased significantly after 1945. While only 104 defense alliances were active within the period 1816-1944, this increased to 178 active alliances between 1945 and 2003.

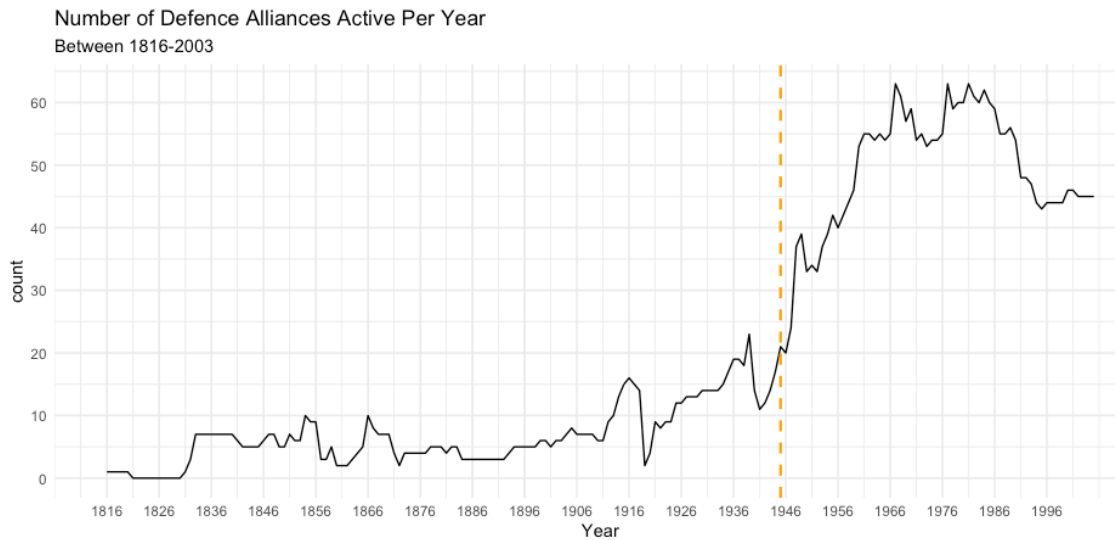


Figure 4.3 Data sourced from Leeds et al., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944.”

Despite the observed increase in the number of defense alliances after 1945, the number of alliance performance opportunities in Berkemeier and Fuhrmann’s dataset decreased in the

same period. As illustrated in Figure 4.4, the number of alliance performance opportunities decreased from 59 instances between 1816 and 1944 to 43 in the period 1945-2003.

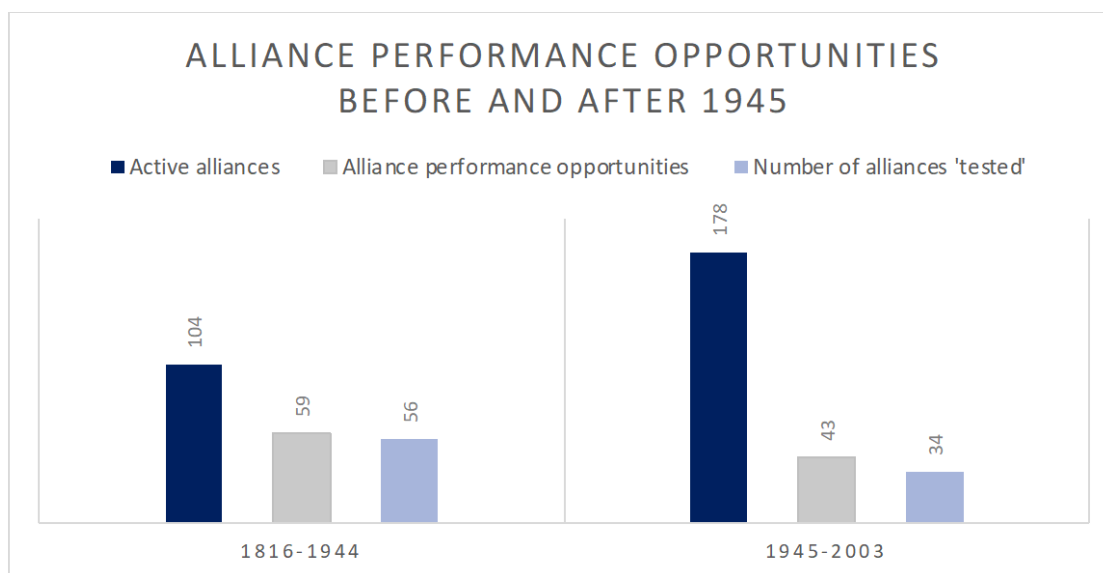


Figure 4.4 Data sourced from Leeds et al., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944” and Fuhrmann, “Replication Data for Reassessing the Fulfillment of Alliance Commitments in War.”

One could counter that the relative decrease in alliance performance opportunities after 1945 may reflect a shorter period and that if one takes this into account, the number of alliance performance opportunities per year actually increased after 1945.<sup>39</sup> However, as illustrated in Figure 4.3, the number of active alliances drastically increased in the same period, which means one should expect a similar increase in the number of alliance performance opportunities. Instead, we observe the opposite tendency in Figure 4.4.

Meanwhile, there is a larger disparity between the overall number of alliance performance opportunities and the number of unique alliances being tested after 1945, than in the preceding period. This suggests that the alliances that are ‘put to the test’ after 1945 have a higher tendency of being tested on multiple occasions.

Put together, these numbers demonstrate that the share of alliances that are tested is significantly smaller in the post-war period. In fact, only 19 percent of all alliances active in the period 1945-2003 were subject to an alliance performance opportunity using the design of Berkemeier and Fuhrmann, compared to 53 percent in the preceding period.

<sup>39</sup> Berkemeier and Fuhrmann identify 0,46 alliance performance opportunities per year in the period 1816–1944, and 0,74 alliance performance opportunities per year 1945–2003.

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In short, the small share of alliances that can be tested with this operationalization suggests the need for a better way of capturing the phenomenon of alliance reliability. In an era with limited interstate warfare, evaluating alliance reliability should not solely rely on the outbreak of interstate war.

#### 4.2.2 Selection bias

Multiple scholarly contributions maintain that defense alliances may serve as credible signals that allied states will assist in the case of an attack on member states.<sup>40</sup> Other researchers argue that alliances that are ‘put to the test’ by war are relatively weaker and appear less reliable alliances in the first place, and are therefore disproportionately targeted.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, Leeds and Johnson point out that credible alliances increase “the potential costs of changing the status quo by force and de-decrease the probability that a challenger expects to succeed in doing so.”<sup>42</sup> Thus some alliances might be less prevalent in the sample because they succeed in deterring conflict. The fact that some alliances deter alliance performance opportunities from occurring in the first place should imply that they are reliable, but such alliances are neither measured nor counted. Moreover, Kuo argues, alliances that are not challenged by war tend to have a higher share of democratic member states that are engaged in significantly more trade and that both factors are typically associated with less internal and external conflict.<sup>43</sup>

If it is true that alliances of dubious reliability are likely to be disproportionately challenged, the resulting sample is expected to be negatively skewed. Hence, in drawing conclusions from such a sample, one should expect a gloomy outcome in terms of alliance reliability. Berkemeier and Fuhrmann’s estimate of alliance reliability, where only 13.95 percent of defense alliances are deemed as honored, might reflect their methodological approach.<sup>44</sup> Citing Schelling, Berkemeier and Fuhrmann indicate that effective alliances may be systematically censored from the data, as “the most effective threat is one that never has to be implemented.”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the authors address the scarcity of major powers from their dataset, while relatively weak states account for a substantial percentage of their alliance performance opportunities. They conjecture that this may be due to the availability of nuclear arms to the most powerful states, which may increase the deterrent effect.<sup>46</sup>

This tendency represents a significant obstacle in analyzing alliance reliability in the current strategic context, as the alliances of greatest scholarly interest, such as NATO, have not been tested in accordance with these parameters. In fact, only 5 of the 19 active U.S. defense alliances between 1945 and 2003 were subjected to alliance performance opportunities using

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<sup>40</sup> See for instance Smith, “Alliance Formation and War” and Morrow, “Alliances, Credibility, and Peacetime Costs.”

<sup>41</sup> Smith, “Alliance Formation and War.” Leeds and Johnson, “Theory, Data, and Deterrence: A Response to Kenwick, Vasquez, and Powers.”

<sup>42</sup> Leeds and Johnson, “Theory, Data, and Deterrence: A Response to Kenwick, Vasquez, and Powers”, 336.

<sup>43</sup> Kuo, “Measurement Choice and Alliance Reliability.”

<sup>44</sup> Berkemeier and Fuhrmann, “Reassessing the Fulfillment of Alliance Commitments in War”, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

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this methodology.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, the very absence of alliance performance opportunities in Berkemeier and Fuhrmann’s data might attest to the deterrent capability of the United States, which further relates to its expected, or perceived, reliability as an ally. If true, this should also be counted as alliance reliability.

Because the alliances that succeed in deterring conflict are exempt from examination and because we cannot make any conclusions about their reliability using the prevailing research design, it is necessary to develop a design that can measure alliance reliability in alliances that are not confronted with war. This means disconnecting alliance reliability from a strict definition of alliance performance opportunities and embracing a broader definition of allied support taking into account the specific language of the treaty and its contextual backdrop.

#### **4.2.3 Failing to take individual treaty obligations and their context into account**

Although Leeds et al. underscore the importance of taking the specific promises in the alliance agreements into account, they only differentiate the *type* of obligations in the categories of defense, offense, neutrality, non-aggression, and consultation.<sup>48</sup> This approach is arguably not sufficiently detailed nor context-sensitive, especially when analyzing defense alliances composed after World War II, characterized by less clearly stipulated military obligations than before 1945.<sup>49</sup>

This tendency of unclear alliance commitments can be illustrated by a closer look at U.S. alliance obligations. After the experience of World War II and the Korean War, President Dwight Eisenhower was particularly careful in avoiding overly constricting commitments abroad.<sup>50</sup> As the country entered into more than a third of the defense alliances in the post-war period during Eisenhower’s time in office, this had implications for U.S. foreign policy after 1945.<sup>51</sup> Almost all U.S. bilateral defense alliances merely require the parties to “act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.”<sup>52</sup> No further specifications are made in terms of what timeframe, way, or scale the allies must ‘act’.

As will be discussed more closely in section 5.3, one may therefore question what exactly the U.S. is obligated to do in the event that *casus foederis* is invoked, and if it is reasonable to interpret this as an obligation to employ force, as Berkemeier and Fuhrmann do. To determine this, a more thorough and contextualized analysis is necessary to grasp the specific obligations contained in the alliance. Because of the inherent vagueness of many alliance treaties after 1945, this may include going beyond the treaty text and taking the intentions and actions of the allied parties into account.<sup>53</sup> For this purpose, formal statements, acts, and memorandums are useful

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<sup>47</sup> Leeds et al., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944.” Fuhrmann, “Replication Data for Reassessing the Fulfillment of Alliance Commitments in War.” The complete list of all U.S. Defense alliances in the time period in question is presented in Table A.1.

<sup>48</sup> Leeds et al., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944.”, 691.

<sup>49</sup> Leeds and Mattes, “Alliance Politics during the Cold War”.

<sup>50</sup> Beckley, “The Myth of Entangling Alliances”, 18; Benson and Niou, “Comprehending Strategic Ambiguity”, 10.

<sup>51</sup> See Table A.2.

<sup>52</sup> Beckley, “The Myth of Entangling Alliances”, 19.

<sup>53</sup> Kim, “U.S. Alliance Obligations in the Disputes in the East and South China Sea”.



contextual indications.<sup>54</sup> An analysis of reliability in the post-World War II era necessitates a more exhaustive and contextualized analysis in order to grasp the specific obligations contained in each treaty.

#### 4.2.4 Requiring direct engagement in conflict

As previously noted, both Leeds et al. and Berkemeier and Fuhrmann require an ally to directly enter a conflict alongside its alliance partner for an alliance commitment to be considered honored. On the one hand, this operationalization appears coherent with the threshold used for an alliance performance opportunity: that an allied state is subjected to the use of armed force by another state on its sovereign territory. On the other hand, it means discounting an alliance as violated unless the allied states engage in war, resulting in the exclusion of allied support short of war. This includes the supply of arms, joint military exercises, military presence and temporary or permanent military bases, political support, and even limited use of force, all of which might constitute contributions to the state’s security in the spirit of the alliance agreement, and even lead to successful deterrence. As such, allied support seems to be a broader term than what is commonly measured. If an ally introduces this type of support as an initial measure and it succeeds in deescalating the conflict, this may remove the necessity of more direct allied engagement. Applying a dichotomy of the violation or honoring of alliance commitments based on the number of battle dead and/or troops deployed risks omitting what may be substantial and effective allied support. Hence, the research design should allow for investigating allied support short of full-scale counterattack, not least as this is proving increasingly relevant in an era marked by grey zone conflicts.<sup>55</sup> Further, it might be more fruitful to operate with dimensions, or degrees of alliance reliability, rather than either/or categorizations.

### 4.3 U.S. alliance reliability

A closer look at U.S. alliance performance opportunities identified from Berkemeier and Fuhrmann’s dataset particularly illustrates the limitations in existing datasets. In total, there are ten cases in the dataset where: 1) the U.S. is a party to a defense alliance, and 2) that alliance is confronted by war between 1945 and 2003. These cases of performance opportunities are marked in blue in the following table.

*Table 4.1 Berkemeier and Fuhrmann’s Alliance Performance Opportunities between 1945 and 2003.*

War	Allies	Commitment type	Honored or violated
World War II	Multilateral (Act of Chapultepec)	Defense, consultation	Violated
World War II	USSR, Yugoslavia	Defense, offense	Violated
World War II	China, USSR	Defense, offense	Honored

<sup>54</sup> Bosack, “Ameliorating the Alliance dilemma in an Age of Gray-Zone Conflict”, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

World War II	USSR, UK, U.S.	Offense	Honored
Korean War 1950-53	Australia, New Zealand, U.S.	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	<i>Violated</i> <sup>56</sup>
Korean War 1950-53	Philippines, U.S.	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Honored
First Taiwan Strait crisis 1954-55	Taiwan, U.S.	Defense, non-aggression	Violated
Sinai 1956	Egypt, Saudi Arabia	Defense, consultation	Violated
Sinai 1956	Multilateral (Arab League)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Sinai 1956	Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen	Defense, consultation	Violated
Sinai 1956	Egypt, Jordan Syria	Defense, consultation	Violated
Soviet-Hungarian Conflict 1956	Multilateral (Warsaw Pact)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Soviet-Hungarian Conflict 1956	Hungary, Romania	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Soviet-Hungarian Conflict 1956	Hungary, USSR	Defense, offense, non-aggression	Violated
Second Taiwan Strait Crisis 1958	Taiwan, U.S.	Defense, non-aggression	Violated
Bizerte 1961	CAR, Chad, Congo, France	Defense, consultation	Violated
Bizerte 1961	France, Madagascar	Defense	Violated
Bizerte 1961	France, Gabon	Defense	Violated
Malaysia 1963-1966	Malaysia, UK	Defense, consultation	Honored
Six Day War 1967	Multilateral (Arab League)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Six Day War 1967	Egypt, Iraq, Jordan	Defense, consultation	Violated
Six Day War 1967	Egypt, Yemen	Defense	Violated
Six Day War 1967	Egypt, Syria	Defense	Honored
Six Day War 1967	Jordan, Saudi Arabia	Defense, offense, non-aggression	Violated
Six Day War 1967	Egypt, Iraq	Defense	Violated
Football War 1969	Multilateral (Rio Pact)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Football War 1969	Multilateral (OAS)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Football War 1969	El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua	Defense, consultation	Violated
Bangladesh Independence War 1971	Multilateral (SEATO)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Bangladesh Independence War 1971	Pakistan, U.S.	Defense, consultation	Violated
Yom Kippur 1973	Jordan, Saudi Arabia	Defense, offense, consultation	Honored
Second Ogaden 1977-1978	Multilateral (Arab League)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Second Ogaden 1977-1978	Ethiopia, Kenya	Defense	Violated

<sup>56</sup> Using the updated “Interstate War Data version 1.2”, New Zealand is in fact coded as participating in the Korean War, so according to Berkemeier and Fuhrmann’s coding rules this should be classified as honored. Berkemeier and Fuhrmann did however utilize the prior version of the dataset, where New Zealand is indicated as a participating ally, making the alliance violated according to their coding scheme.

Ugandan-Tanzanian War 1978-79	Sudan, Uganda	Defense	Violated
Lebanon 1982	Multilateral (Arab League)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Lebanon 1982	Algeria, Libya, Syria, Yemen	Defense	Violated
Aouzou Strip 1986-87	Multilateral (Arab League)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Gulf War 1991	Canada, Bahrain	Defense	Violated
Gulf War 1991	Multilateral (Arab League)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Azeri-Armenian Conflict 1993-94	Multilateral (Post-Soviet states)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Azeri-Armenian Conflict 1993-94	Multilateral (Post-Soviet states)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Azeri-Armenian Conflict 1993-94	Azerbaijan, Turkey	Defense	Violated
Badme War 1998-2001	Ethiopia, Kenya	Defense	Violated
Iraq War 2003	Multilateral (Arab League)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated

To identify which of the ten cases constitute U.S. alliance performance opportunities, the *casus foederis* of each alliance was taken into account in order to establish whether U.S. defense commitments applied. Another condition is that it was not the U.S. itself that required support, meaning that cases in which the U.S. was the sole allied party under attack are excluded. Further details about the cases that were omitted in this process are found in the Appendix.

After making these adjustments, there remain five identified cases of U.S. alliance performance opportunity across four conflicts during the time period at hand:

*Table 4.2 U.S. alliance performance opportunities 1945-2003.<sup>57</sup>*

<b>War</b>	<b>Allies</b>	<b>Commitment type</b>	<b>Honored or violated</b>
First Taiwan Strait crisis 1954-55	Taiwan, U.S.	Defense, non-aggression	Violated
Second Taiwan Strait Crisis 1958	Taiwan, U.S.	Defense, non-aggression	Violated
Football War 1969	Multilateral (Rio Pact)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Football War 1969	Multilateral (OAS)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Bangladesh Independence War 1971	Pakistan, U.S.	Defense, consultation	Violated

The first instance is the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954–55, where the U.S. was committed to the defense of Taiwan through the ‘Mutual Defense Treaty’ of 1954, the accompanying treaty notes, and the associated ‘Joint Resolution’ of 1955. The same alliance obligations were present in the Second Taiwan Crisis in 1958. The Football War between Honduras and El Salvador in

<sup>57</sup> Fuhrmann, “Replication Data for Reassessing the Fulfillment of Alliance Commitments in War.”

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1969 represents the third and fourth alliance performance opportunities, as the U.S. held defense commitments to both warring parties through the OAS and Rio treaties. Lastly, the Bangladesh Independence War in 1971 invoked the 1959 ‘Agreement of Cooperation’ between the U.S. and Pakistan. In all five alliance performance opportunities, Berkemeier and Fuhrman classify the alliance commitments as violated by the U.S.

Four observations can be made from this list. First, the number of alliance performance opportunities is remarkably small, despite the U.S. holding defense commitments to 71 unique states through 19 defense alliances in the same period.<sup>58</sup> Second, the performance opportunities consist of cases in states where the potential for conflict may be considered rather high from the outset. Third, as expected, NATO and all other alliances between the U.S. and European states and other North-American states are absent from the sample. Fourth, when applying a looser definition of allied support, one sees that the U.S. has provided a wide range of support to both formal allies and other aligned states. Such support consists of access to military infrastructure, provisions of arms, intelligence and military logistics, military training and expertise, funding of military expenditures, conducting joint operations, etc.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, U.S. troops have on multiple occasions been deployed abroad in the support of allies.<sup>60</sup> This includes permanently stationed forces in Europe of up to 193 000 U.S. soldiers after 1945, stabilizing at a U.S. Army force posture of about 60 000 soldiers by the end of the century.<sup>61</sup> These examples suggest that even if it is correct that the U.S. has not honored the full extent of its commitments in the select cases, it has still offered substantial allied support which is not reflected in existing datasets.

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<sup>58</sup> See Table 4.2 for the complete list of active U.S. Defense alliances.

Leeds et al. “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944.”

<sup>59</sup> Meier, Karlén, Pettersson and Croicu, “External Support in Armed Conflicts. Introducing the UCDP External Support Dataset (ESD), 1975-2017.”

<sup>60</sup> For an overview of instances in which the U.S. has used its Armed Forces abroad, see for example Torreon and Plagakis, “Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-202.”

<sup>61</sup> Hicks et al., “Overview of U.S. Forces in Europe”, 14-15.

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## 5 The Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1958

### 5.1 Origins of the crisis

Since the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949 there has been enduring tension between Taiwan, officially the Republic of China (ROC), and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Originating with a Communist uprising in 1927, the Civil War concluded with a Communist victory and the establishment of the PRC in Mainland China under Mao. Meanwhile, Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist government relocated to the island of Taiwan. Despite the retreat, Chiang Kai-shek's ambitions of reconquering the mainland remained steadfast. Equally, the PRC never abandoned its claim over Taiwan. However, the outbreak of the Korean War induced the U.S. to support the ROC as a part of U.S. containment policy. The partnership between the U.S. and the ROC was formalized in 1954 with the ratification of the Mutual Defense Treaty.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, several military incidents occurred in the Taiwan Strait. The disputes especially centered on the Offshore Island groups of Kinmen (Quemoy) and Matsu (Mazu) islands, controlled by the Nationalists. However, the two island groups are located only approximately 2 and 16 km, respectively, from the coastline of the PRC. In the aftermath of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis (1954-1955), the ROC started moving military forces from Taiwan to Kinmen. In the succeeding years, Taipei gradually increased its deployment of troops, so that by August 1958, one-third of Taiwan's forces were deployed on Kinmen and Matsu islands, close to mainland China. The implication of this development was that by the time of the second Taiwan Strait crisis, the potential loss of the offshore islands might endanger the very survival of the Nationalist regime.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Cha, *Powerplay*, 65-68.

<sup>63</sup> Soman, "'Who's Daddy' in the Taiwan Strait", 375.



Figure 4.5 Map of the Taiwan Strait. Source: Depositphotos

## 5.2 Summary of the Second Taiwan Crisis

The Second Taiwan Strait Crisis commenced in the early hours of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1958, when the PRC began firing 20 000 artillery rounds at Kinmen and Matsu. In the following weeks, continued PRC artillery directed towards supply convoys succeeded in blockading supplies from the islands. In total, the PRC fired 474 910 rounds at the Kinmen Islands between August 23<sup>rd</sup> to October 6<sup>th</sup>, resulting in 2596 military casualties, including 489 killed.<sup>64</sup>

Thereafter, the conflict escalated into a naval clash on August 24 and 25 between the Chinese Communist and Chinese Nationalist forces, as the former attempted to capture Dongding Island, located south of Kinmen and controlled by the ROC.<sup>65</sup> In the process, PRC forces sunk one Nationalist landing craft and damaged a second one. Shortly after, the PRC claimed a territorial sea of 12 nautical miles around its territories, which placed all the Offshore Islands within the territorial waters of the PRC.<sup>66</sup>

After September 2<sup>nd</sup>, the PRC reduced its artillery action, but several air battles ensued. Equipped with American Sidewinder missiles, Taiwanese forces outclassed its mainland counterpart and succeeded in destroying a number of PRC fighter aircraft.<sup>67</sup> The ROC's success

<sup>64</sup> Halperin, "The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis", 309.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, vi-viii.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

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in the air contributed to ending the supply crisis by late September. The PRC declared a ceasefire on October 6<sup>th</sup>, conditioned on the cease of U.S. forces convoying of ROC supply boats. With the exception of an incident on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October when Secretary of State John Foster Dulles visited Taiwan, the ceasefire lasted until October 25<sup>th</sup>. Subsequently, the PRC resumed shelling the Offshore Islands, although the attacks were reserved for odd-numbered days.<sup>68</sup>

### 5.3 What were the alliance obligations?

U.S. alliance commitments to Taiwan at the time of the 1958 crisis consisted of the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954 and accompanying treaty notes, as well as the congressional Joint Resolution of 1955, often coined the Formosa Resolution.<sup>69</sup> The Mutual Defense Treaty stipulates the following defense obligations:

*Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the West Pacific Area directed against the territories of either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.*<sup>70</sup>

In the absence of a clear stipulation of what is considered an ‘armed attack’ within the context of the treaty, we may rely on the definition provided in the 1986 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in *Nicaragua v. United States*.<sup>71</sup> As summarized by Bosack, “the court found that an armed attack constitutes an armed incursion into the sovereign territory of a state attributable to a specific member of the international community”.<sup>72</sup>

Beyond the ICJ’s definition of an armed attack, the defense commitments stipulated in the treaty are rather ambiguous. First, the treaty merely requires the alliance partners to ‘act’ in cases of armed attack directed against any of the parties within the geographical limits of the West Pacific, without specifying within what timeframe, in what way, or scale. Hence, according to some analysts, the U.S. was strictly speaking not legally obliged to respond militarily in case of an armed attack by the PRC.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, the conditional clause of acting “in accordance with constitutional processes” adds another layer of uncertainty, as it indicates the necessity for congressional approval.<sup>74</sup>

As previously noted, these formulations are not unique to the U.S.-Taiwan treaty and created legal loopholes that gave the U.S. significant foreign policy flexibility.<sup>75</sup> By avoiding specifying

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<sup>68</sup> Soman, “‘Who’s Daddy’ in the Taiwan Strait”, 389.

<sup>69</sup> Formosa was the term employed by the U.S. government for Taiwan at the time.

<sup>70</sup> “Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of China.” *UNTS Vol. 248*, No. 3496: 214-225.

<sup>71</sup> *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and Against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v United States)*, [1986] ICJ Rep 14.

<sup>72</sup> Bosack, “Ameliorating the Alliance dilemma in an Age of Gray-Zone Conflict”, 7.

<sup>73</sup> Ku, “Taiwan’s U.S. Defense Guarantee is Not Strong, But It Isn’t That Weak Either.”

<sup>74</sup> Carcia and Mason, “Congressional Oversight and Related Issues Concerning International Security Agreements Concluded by the United States”, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Beckley, “The Myth of Entangling Alliances”, 19.

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the conditions under which the U.S. would become militarily involved, the U.S. intentionally added an element of insecurity to the decision-making process of both the PRC and the ROC. This policy of strategic ambiguity was intended to discourage aggression from both sides of the strait by creating uncertainty about possible U.S. intentions.<sup>76</sup>

Whilst the exact measures the parties are bound to remain vague in the treaty, it does expressly state the U.S. intention and commitment to defend Taiwan through a legally binding document. The very existence of a defense treaty demonstrates that the U.S. was at least partly committed to using force to defend Taiwan. This sentiment is echoed in the National Security Council Report NSC 5723, which was the last formal action made by the highest levels of the U.S. government regarding its policy toward Taiwan and the Offshore Islands prior to the crisis.<sup>77</sup> The paper states the U.S. intent to:

Effectively implement the terms of the Mutual Defense Treaty, taking all necessary measures to defend Taiwan and the Penghus against armed attack.

Seek to preserve, through United Nations action if appropriate, the status quo of the GRC[ROC]-held off-shore islands. Provide to the GRC forces, military equipment and training to assist them to defend such off-shore islands, using Taiwan as a base. U.S. forces will be used to assist the Chinese Nationalists to defend the GRC-held offshore islands from Chinese Communist attacks whenever the President judges such action to be required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Taiwan and the Penghus.<sup>78</sup>

Eisenhower was furthermore formally granted authorization to use force in the defense of Taiwan and the Offshore Islands almost unanimously by both houses of Congress through the passing of the Formosa Resolution.<sup>79</sup> The resolution stated that:

[T]he President of the United States be and he hereby is authorized to employ the Armed Forces of the United States as he deems necessary for the specific purpose of securing and protecting Formosa [Taiwan] and the Pescadores against armed attack, this authority to include the securing and protection of such related positions and territories of that area now in friendly hands and the taking of such other measures as he judges to be required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores to include the securing and protection of such related positions and territories of that area now in friendly hands and the taking of such other measures as he judges to be required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Benson and Niou, "Comprehending Strategic Ambiguity", 2-3.

<sup>77</sup> Halperin, "The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis", 44.

<sup>78</sup> NSC, "Statement of Policy by the National Security Council on U.S. Policy Toward Taiwan and the Government Of The Republic Of China."

<sup>79</sup> Waxman, "Remembering Eisenhower's Formosa AUMF."

<sup>80</sup> "Joint resolution authorizing the President to employ the Armed Forces of the United States for protecting the security of Formosa, the Pescadores and related positions and territories of that area." H.J.Res.159.



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Although never invoked, the resolution granted the president vast discretion to act how he deemed necessary to protect Taiwan, and without the congressional consultations required through the Mutual Defense Treaty.<sup>81</sup> It furthermore authorized the defense of the Kinmen and Matsu islands, but only if this was deemed necessary to defend Taiwan.<sup>82</sup>

While authorization to defend the Offshore Islands does not equate the obligation to do so, the ‘Newport Statement’ issued by U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in 1958, reinforces U.S. commitments. Dulles stated that “the securing and protecting of Quemoy and Matsu have increasingly become related to the defense of Taiwan”, and went far in accentuating U.S. determination to defend the islands.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the Newport statement can be interpreted as another confirmation that the U.S. regarded its obligation towards Taiwan to encompass the armed defense of the Offshore Islands.

Consequently, the combined corpus of informal indications enforced the reputational and moral obligations for the U.S. to act militarily to defend Taiwan and the Offshore Islands. While it is debated whether this constitutes a legal obligation, the few attempts at performing a legal analysis of the treaty appear to conclude that the U.S. was indeed bound to use force in the defense of the ROC.<sup>84</sup>

Hence, we may conclude that the U.S. was bound by treaty to deploy some type of defense measure in the case of an armed attack directed against Taiwan. This commitment also effectively included the defense of the offshore islands if it was deemed vital to the security of Taiwan. Thus, the treaty and associated clarifying information may be interpreted as a reputational, moral, and possibly legal obligation for the U.S. to defend the ROC and Offshore Islands by use of force if attacked, in line with Berkemeier and Fuhrmann’s classification. However, in light of the purposefully ambiguous alliance obligations, determining the extent of the obligations is far from clear-cut.

#### **5.4 Was casus foederis met?**

The casus foederis in the Mutual Defense Treaty covered i) an armed attack against Taiwan and ii) that this commitment included the Offshore Islands if the defense of the latter was deemed necessary for the defense of the ROC. In regards to the first requirement, the shelling of Kinmen, the naval blockade, and the attempted capture of Dongding Island constitute an armed attack as stipulated in *Nicaragua v. United States*. For the second requirement, the deployment of one-third of ROC forces on the islands as well as substantial military materiel meant that preserving Nationalist control of Kinmen and Matsu was indeed considered essential for the

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<sup>81</sup> Waxman, “Remembering Eisenhower’s Formosa AUMF.”

<sup>82</sup> Halperin, “The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis”, 52.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>84</sup> See for instance Huang, David KC. “U.S. foreign policy regarding the defense of Taiwan: a critical analysis in accordance with U.S. law.” *Asian Journal of Political Science* 28, no. 3 (2020): 256-274.

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survival of the ROC. This viewpoint was also maintained in the top levels of the U.S. government and Defense.<sup>85</sup>

## **5.5 To what extent were the obligations fulfilled?**

### **5.5.1 U.S. military measures during the crisis**

During the crisis, the U.S. undertook a number of measures in support of the ROC, including the following.

First, the U.S. intensified its supply of arms to the ROC during the crises. The supply of military materiel included replacing ROC artillery with American howitzers and the equipment of ROC fighter planes with sidewinder air-to-air missiles. The latter contributed to ROC successes in the air battles against PRC's Soviet-supplied MIGs.<sup>86</sup>

Second, the White House made detailed plans for the defense of the ROC, both internally, and in conjunction with the ROC. The internal U.S. preparation included plans for potential nuclear attacks, although this was never disclosed to the ROC for fear of giving incentives for further escalation of hostilities. Based on his study of discussions and presidential memorandums from the crisis, Halperin concludes that Eisenhower was fully prepared to use tactical nuclear weapons for precision strikes against the PRC.<sup>87</sup> It was furthermore felt among the Joint Chiefs that the use of nuclear weapons would eventually be necessary to defend Kinmen.<sup>88</sup> To this end, three 8-inch howitzers capable of firing nuclear shells were landed on Kinmen on September 17<sup>th</sup>, followed up by a statement by Air Force Secretary James Douglas announcing that U.S. forces were ready to deploy nuclear weapons against mainland China.<sup>89</sup>

Third, the U.S. also conducted several displays of force in the Taiwan Strait and surrounding area. This included the mobilization of forces to augment an air defense exercise over Taiwan and conducting daily surveys of the strait.<sup>90</sup> The Seventh Fleet capacity was increased to 3 cruisers, 5 aircraft carriers, 41 destroyers, and destroyer escorts as well as 7 attack submarines.<sup>91</sup> A key measure during the crisis was the securing of supply lines from Taiwan to the Offshore Islands. Although the U.S. convoying was restricted to international waters up to 20 miles from the PRC coastline and the Navy was given instructions not to fire unless provoked, it was arguably instrumental in ending the crisis. It also brought about the closest Chinese and American forces that came to direct combat in this crisis, during an event on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August when the U.S. destroyer U.S.S *Hopewell* proceeded to the assistance of a Nationalist landing

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<sup>85</sup> Halperin, "The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis", 273-276.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>89</sup> Soman, "'Who's Daddy' in the Taiwan Strait", 387.

<sup>90</sup> Halperin, "The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis", 134-135.

<sup>91</sup> Soman, "'Who's Daddy' in the Taiwan Strait", 381

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ship under attack by PRC patrol torpedo boats. Upon the arrival of the U.S. ship, the PRC boats hastily retreated without firing on the destroyer.<sup>92</sup>

In sum, the U.S. supplied the ROC with essential weapons, made detailed plans for potential nuclear attacks, and conducted military operations within the theatre of war, including providing direct support to Nationalist forces under attack. Following Jones et al.'s taxonomy of force, the U.S. support constituted the threat- and display of force, but it did not employ the use of force.<sup>93</sup>

### **5.5.2 The question of fulfillment**

Based on the strict operationalization of alliance fulfillment employed by Berkemeier and Fuhrmann, the absence of the use of force implies that U.S. measures would be considered an alliance violation. Yet, this assessment fails to take into account the significance and comprehensiveness of U.S. support.

A less stringent definition of alliance fulfillment would include support short of direct engagement. One may for instance argue that the employed U.S. measures appears to have contributed to deterring a further PRC attack, thus securing the ROC's independence and territorial sovereignty, which was the ultimate objective of the alliance.

Given that the military support provided by the U.S. seemed sufficient to deter further escalation, one cannot conclude whether the U.S. would have engaged more directly if the support provided had not ended the crisis. As illustrated by the incident involving USS *Hopewell*, which was under orders not to fire unless fired upon, the U.S. would have become directly involved had the PRC patrol boats decided to engage.<sup>94</sup> This would constitute the use of force and be categorized as an alliance fulfillment following a stricter operationalization.

Moreover, the documentation of U.S. deliberations during the crisis leaves little doubt that the U.S. clearly signaled its intention to intervene and that it was even prepared to back up this threat with the use of nuclear weapons if necessary.<sup>95</sup> This supports the position that the U.S. did indeed honor the alliance, but that the use of force was deemed superfluous.

Following this line of argument, cases where the initial measures successfully achieved the defensive aim of the alliance, thus preventing the need for further engagement, may also be considered alliance fulfillment. Hence, the significance of U.S. measures in the Second Taiwan Crisis underscores the need for nuanced analysis to be able to conclude on alliance reliability.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 380-381; Elleman, "High Seas Buffer", 102-103.

<sup>93</sup> Jones et al, "Militarized interstate disputes, 1816-1992: Rationale, coding rules, and empirical patterns."

<sup>94</sup> Elleman, "High Seas Buffer", 102-103.

<sup>95</sup> Soman, "'Who's Daddy' in the Taiwan Strait", 394.

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## 6 Concluding remarks: Implications for future research on alliance reliability

While the existing literature provides valuable contributions to the conceptualization of alliance reliability, it rests on restrictive assumptions and definitions that might render the results imprecise. To get closer to a more nuanced understanding of alliance reliability in general, and U.S. alliance reliability in particular, this report has identified certain measures to take into account when applying the information provided by existing research.

First, while alliance cohesion and coercive success have been proposed as potential alternative measures of reliability, performance opportunities may still be a valuable way to measure alliance reliability. However, it is not given that alliance performance opportunities should be contingent on interstate wars. To get a more precise overview, it might be wise to also include other types of attacks, such as extra-state violence, in order to reflect a changing strategic context.

Sampling a representative selection of alliances confronted by war regardless of their relative strength or credibility, is challenging. One possible solution may be to consider peacetime measures in addition to support during conflict and to include in the definition of allied support measures beyond military means, according to the text and the spirit of the alliance commitment. This would mean that alliances that successfully deter conflict may be measured in terms of alliance reliability. One way may be to include what Morrow describes as ‘peacetime costs’ into the operationalization.<sup>96</sup> By coordinating military and foreign policy, Morrow argues that the tightness of alliances increases, while the vulnerability and flexibility of the allied states decreases. This may take the form of basing troops on allied territory and coordinating military and foreign policy. Such measures may be regarded as minor tests of allied reliability in peacetime.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, including factors such as joint military exercises and institutionalization may remedy part of the problem of selection bias in the alliance reliability research, by considering measures taken in the absence of conflict.

Furthermore, each alliance should be subjected to a comprehensive examination beyond obligation type classification. This is especially pertinent in studying alliance commitments after 1945 due to the prevalence of vague commitments. As illustrated by the Taiwan case, it is not a given that the U.S. was obligated to provide armed support despite the presence of a defense alliance, and determining the extent of the commitments required comprehensive considerations.

In terms of the operationalization of alliance fulfillment, allied support short of direct engagement should be considered, especially in cases of vague alliance treaties. As pointed out earlier, this may include considering whether the measures taken achieve the defensive aim of

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<sup>96</sup> Morrow, “Alliances, Credibility, and Peacetime Costs.”

<sup>97</sup> Poast, *Arguing about Alliances: The Art of Agreement in Military-Pact Negotiations*, 174.

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the alliance, even if this does not involve the use of force. Instead of employing a dichotomous dependent variable, a continuous scale could provide more nuanced insight into alliance fulfillment.

Future research should build on the valuable foundation that existing research provides and address its limitations by widening the conceptualization of both alliance performance opportunities and alliance fulfillment. Developing a more valid measurement of alliance reliability may offer insight for researchers and policymakers alike, which may expand our knowledge of how and when alliances function. In light of the current strategic climate, enhanced understanding of the workings of alliances will be of continued importance.

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## Appendix

### A Specifications for cases that are not considered U.S. alliance performance opportunities

There are five instances where the U.S. was involved in a conflict through a defense alliance that is not characterized as a U.S. alliance performance opportunity. This is due to the lack of U.S. defense obligations, absence of *casus foederis*, and/or the U.S. being the party that is owed allied support. These cases are marked in blue in Table A.1 and are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Table A.1 Potential U.S. Alliance Performance Opportunities.

War	Allies	Commitment type	Honored or violated
World War II	Multilateral (Act of Chapultepec)	Defense, consultation	Violated
World War II	USSR, UK, U.S.	Offense	Honored
Korean War 1950-53	Australia, New Zealand, U.S.	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	<i>Violated</i> <sup>98</sup>
Korean War 1950-53	Philippines, U.S.	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Honored
First Taiwan Strait crisis 1954-55	Taiwan, U.S.	Defense, non-aggression	Violated
Second Taiwan Strait Crisis 1958	Taiwan, U.S.	Defense, non-aggression	Violated
Football War 1969	Multilateral (Rio Pact)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Football War 1969	Multilateral (OAS)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Bangladesh Independence War 1971	Multilateral (SEATO)	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Violated
Bangladesh Independence War 1971	Pakistan, U.S.	Defense, consultation	Violated

The first instance is the end of World War II where the Act of Chapultepec was invoked through the U.S. being attacked by both Japan and Germany in 1945. As the U.S. was the only party to the alliance that is coded as attacked, it did not hold any obligations towards the other allies of

<sup>98</sup> Using the updated “Interstate War Data version 1.2”, New Zealand is in fact coded as participating in the Korean War, so according to Berkemeier and Fuhrmann’s coding rules this should be classified as honored. Berkemeier and Fuhrmann did however utilize the prior version of the dataset, where New Zealand is indicated as a participating ally, making the alliance violated according to their coding scheme.

the Act of Chapultepec. The second instance in World War II represents the USSR, UK, and U.S. offense pact of February 1945. This treaty only stipulated obligations for the USSR regarding its proceedings in the war with Japan, so that the U.S. did not hold any defensive commitments.

Next, the Korean War activated ANZUS, which consists of the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand. Similar to the first example, the U.S. is coded as the only ally under attack by Russia and China in Reiter et al.'s dataset.<sup>99</sup> Also, take note that this alliance commitment was actually honored by New Zealand, contrary to Berkemeier and Fuhrmann's coding.

Furthermore, the Korean War also activated the Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of the Philippines and the U.S. Once again, the U.S. was the only party to the alliance under attack according to Reiter. Lastly, the Bangladesh Independence War of 1971 did not invoke the U.S. obligations to Pakistan as previously mentioned. This was due to U.S. defense commitments being explicitly conditioned on a communist attack, which did not occur.<sup>100</sup>

### Active U.S. Defense Alliances between 1945 and 2003

Table A.2 Active U.S. Defense Alliances between 1945 and 2003<sup>101</sup>

Name of the alliance	Start year <sup>102</sup>	End year	Commitment type	U.S. Allies
U.S.–Portuguese agreement	1944	1946	Defense, offense	Portugal
Act of Chapultepec	1945	1947	Defense, consultation	Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay
Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty)	1947	-	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Bahamas, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay
Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS)	1948	-	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Bahamas, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua & Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay
NATO	1949	-	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Canada, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Italy, Albania, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, Greece,

<sup>99</sup> Reiter et al., “A deeper look at interstate war data: Interstate War Data version 1.1.”

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Leeds et al., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944.”

<sup>102</sup> Indicates the year of signature. Leeds et al contests that “once an alliance is signed, leaders behave as if the alliance is in force”; and therefor utilizes the signature date rather than the date of ratification.

				Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Turkey
Mutual Defense Treaty Between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America	1951	-	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Philippines
Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) <sup>103</sup>	1951	-	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Australia, New Zealand
Security Treaty between the United States and Japan	1951	1960	Defense, consultation	Japan
Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea	1953	-	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	South Korea
Pacific Charter - Southeast Asia Treaty Organization	1954	-	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	United Kingdom, France, Pakistan, Thailand, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand
Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of China	1954	1980	Defense, non-aggression	Taiwan
Agreement of cooperation	1959	-	Defense, consultation	Pakistan
Agreement of cooperation	1959	-	Defense, consultation	Turkey
Agreement of cooperation	1959	1979	Defense, consultation	Iran
Treaty of Mutual Co-operation and Security between Japan and the United States of America (with the exchange of notes and agreed minutes)	1960	-	Defense, non-aggression, consultation	Japan
Defense Agreement between the United States of America and Spain	1963	1970	Defense	Spain
Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation	1976	1981	Defense, consultation	Spain
Panama Canal Treaty	1977	1999	Defense	Panama
Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Cooperation	1981	1991	Defense, consultation	Israel

<sup>103</sup> Due to New Zealand establishing a nuclear-free zone in its territorial waters in 1986, the U.S. suspended its obligations towards New Zealand. However, the Australia and U.S. treaty is still in effect, and separately, the obligations between Australia and New Zealand. The alliance was furthermore recently overshadowed by the initiation of the trilateral security alliance AUKUS; consisting of Australia, the United Kingdom and the U.S.

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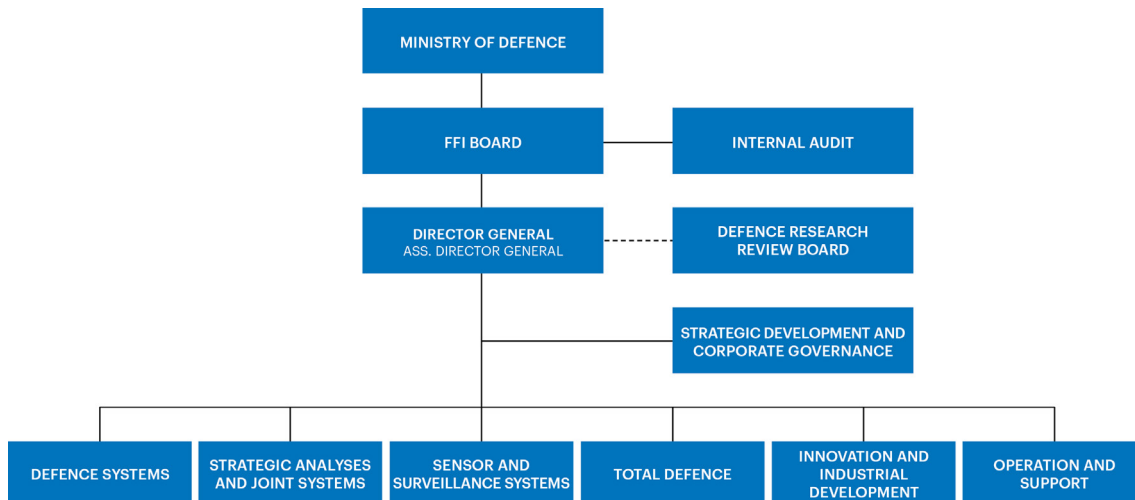
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