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The Allied Defence Dilemma: Balancing between Autonomy and Alliance Cohesion

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Against the backdrop of both an exacerbation of the threat environment and growing uncertainty about the reliability of the US security guarantee, in recent years allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific have begun reinforcing their militaries. Such efforts were framed as necessary, at least in part, for the sake of alliance cohesion: greater burden-sharing would make the alliance more attractive as it would render the US commitment less costly. Reality is more complex, however. Asymmetric alliances typically have both a 'capability aggregating' and 'control' value, and therefore increased protégé strength can upset the terms on which an alliance is based, potentially pushing a patron away. Aware of the risks that come with this trade-off between greater spending and alliance cohesion, protégés adopt various strategies to mitigate the potential loss in patron commitment and as such maximise their security (getting both arms and allies). This project examines how these protégé defence efforts reflect different calculations of the potential costs and benefits of increased burden-sharing. It hypothesises that allied defence strategies are shaped by protégé perceptions of both the abandonment cost and probability. Variation within these variables leads them to pursue autonomy-focused or patron-leaning defence strategies. To test this claim, this project examines the evolution in defence strategies among four US middle power allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific throughout the Cold War, post-Cold War period and current era.

Are you a PhD student or early-career researcher?

Yes

What discipline or branch of humanities or social sciences do you identify yourself with?

International relations

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Yes, I have included all required information (see below).

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