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Research article

Collective Memory and National Role Conceptions: The Legacy of Violence on Foreign Policy in Austria and Greece During the Cold War

The winner of the 20th anniversary award[1]

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Abstract

This article investigates the influence of collective memories of violence on the foreign policies of small states, focusing on Austria and Greece as two 'frontline states' of the early Cold War in Europe. The article develops an analytical framework linking memory narratives to policy. Using qualitative discourse analysis, it shows how policy elites framed past violence either as heroic sacrifice or as national victimisation to conceptualise and legitimise diverging foreign policy strategies. The findings demonstrate that the selective remembrance of past violence shapes national role conceptions and strategic choices. They underscore memory's role as a strategic resource for policy elites, offering new directions for scholarship on the ideational foundations of small state foreign policy.

Keywords: *small states, foreign policy, violence, memory, national role conceptions, Austria, Greece*

1 The winner of the 20th anniversary award for the best paper by a PhD candidate, a postgraduate (Master's) student or a recent graduate.

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Introduction

Small states play an active role in global politics, frequently defying the realist assumption that their strategic choices are limited to balancing, bandwagoning or hedging. For example, the Baltic states have successfully lobbied NATO to strengthen its deterrence posture toward Russia, challenging the notion that small states merely follow the lead of larger allies. Norway has acted as an issue leader in international diplomacy and mediation. Cyprus and Malta have influenced the European Union's migration policies. These cases illustrate that, even though small states' autonomy in international politics is certainly limited, they engage proactively with their strategic environment and may pursue interests that do not align with the preferences of larger powers.

How, then, do small states devise foreign policy strategies? This article explores the importance of historical memory in the formulation of foreign policy. It makes the case that conceptions of national identity, which serve as the foundation for foreign policy strategies, are heavily influenced by memories of political violence. Although material constraints shape the range of foreign policy strategies small states can plausibly adopt, they do not determine how these states perceive threats or define their international roles. Instead, memory narratives of past violence influence both how security is framed and how it is institutionalised.

While constructivist International Relations (IR) theories emphasise the importance of identity and norms for the definition of the national interest, the field has paid limited attention to the specific role of collective memory in shaping small state security. For their part, interdisciplinary memory studies are mostly concentrated on domestic identity politics rather than on international behaviour. By developing an analytical framework that connects memory to policy, this article bridges the gap between these literatures. It argues that the formative impact of memories of violence on small states' foreign policy operates through two primary mechanisms. First, elite framing uses narratives of glory, sacrifice, defeat and renewal to make sense of historical experiences of violence. Second, the resulting moral and strategic lessons from the past are institutionalised in national security doctrines, material organisations of national security and everyday policy practices. Both mechanisms interact with the material constraints small states face to shape the foreign policy strategies they pursue.

This article investigates empirically how Cold War role conceptions in Austria and Greece were influenced by collective memories of early 20th-century violence. Although both countries experienced intense political violence during the early 20th century, they developed different interpretations on this history starting in the late 1940s, when both found themselves as 'frontline states' of the Cold War

in Europe. While past violence was framed in terms of heroic sacrifice in Greece, it was portrayed as national victimisation in Austria. The two countries' different foreign policy approaches during the Cold War were influenced by these divergent memory narratives.

The article applies qualitative discourse analysis to these two complementary but contrasting historical cases, starting from the premise that policy actors are doing something by saying something – that is, that public discourse does not simply describe but constitutes political reality. The analysis follows an interpretive coding strategy. During repeated close readings of the empirical material, codes emerged iteratively around recurrent narrative elements such as sacrifice, victimisation and renewal which, as the analysis shows, policymakers and senior national security officials invoked to justify foreign policy choices. The empirical material used consists of primary documents collected from public and private archives in both countries, supplemented by press sources, (auto)biographical writings and the historiographical literature. The analysis focuses on the period from 1949, following the end of the Greek Civil War, to the late 1950s, when both countries consolidated their international alignments as frontline states of the Cold War in Europe.

The article makes two key contributions. First, it provides a more robust theoretical framework for understanding the connection between memory, identity and foreign policy. Second, it expands constructivist IR's conceptual and empirical engagement with small state security. Following a review of the pertinent literature in memory studies and constructivist IR, the article develops an analytical framework that links memory to policy preferences through the mechanisms of elite framing and institutionalisation. This framework is then used to examine how memory narratives influenced national role conceptions in Austria and Greece during the early Cold War. The findings' wider implications for the study of small states and the role of memory in global politics are discussed in the conclusion.

Small states in international politics: Agency, role and collective memory

Noting the challenges associated with quantitatively focused definitions of the small state (Wivel, Bailes & Archer 2014: 5–6; Neumann & Gstöhl 2006: 4), recent IR scholarship has moved toward using the concept of the small state as a focusing device that concentrates on the examination of these states' behaviour within global hierarchies of power. According to this relational approach, small states are defined by their position vis-à-vis other states and by the strategies they use to exercise agency (Wivel 2021: 492). It also uses a more comprehensive concept of power, which includes normative and symbolic forms of influence in addition to material capabilities (Dombrowski & Reich: 6–11, 14–19).

A relational perspective enables the application to small state studies of a core constructivist insight: that processes of identity construction influence how states define and pursue their national interests (Ruggie 1998: 20–22; Finnemore 1996: 1–2; Katzenstein 1996: 73). In this context, ontological security theory (OST) and role theory offer particularly useful frameworks for understanding the ideational drivers of a state's external behaviour. According to OST, states aim to maintain a stable sense of identity, beyond mere physical survival (Bachleitner 2021a: 12–15; Subotić 2016: 613–615; Mitzen 2006: 351–353). Role theory, for its part, examines how a state's self-conception relates to its actions in the international system (Brummer & Thies 2015: 276–277; Cantir & Kaarbo 2012: 11; Breuning 2011: 20–22). Both theories draw attention to the tension inherent in identity-building processes. Although identity provides a sense of internal coherence, it also requires differentiation from external others. It only emerges through comparison with – and distinction from – significant others (Wehner & Thies 2014: 419–421; Harnisch 2011: 46–48; Berenskoetter 2007: 657–658).

For small states, larger powers represent such significant others because their international position depends to an important extent on the recognition and support of more powerful actors. However, there is also a temporal dimension of identity construction, in which states draw on their own historical experience as a source of role content (Bachleitner 2021b: 28–29). This underscores the importance of a society's collective memory – shared narratives of the past that encode accepted interpretations of historical experiences – for contemporary national role conceptions (Cubitt 2007: 26–27, 234–235; Winter 2006: 57; Bastide 1970: 95–96). Such memories can assume an almost existential significance in forming conceptions of national security for small states that have suffered from acute vulnerability to external threats and internal fragmentation.

In these cases, the ability of policy elites to organise historical narratives in ways that reaffirm national identity constitutes an important ideational resource (Steele 2008: 57–60). These narratives are neither objective records of historical fact nor entirely subjective accounts of the past. Rather, they represent the past selectively by simplifying complex events, reducing their ambiguity and infusing them with moral messages (Olick 2007: 23, 40, 56; Zehfuss 2006: 229; Edkins 2003: 229; Zerubavel 2003a: 23–31, 83–87; Müller 2002: 22–24). They become salient for foreign policymaking in the present under two conditions: first, they must resonate with widely shared perceptions of insecurity and national purpose; and second, they need to be institutionalised in policy practice.

National role conceptions and narratives of violence: An analytical framework

Collective memories of dramatic episodes in national history, often involving violence, are important elements in the formation of national role conceptions.

Memories of violence are particularly relevant for small states because of their vulnerability to external domination. The analytical framework proposed in this section shows how memories of violence become embedded in the concepts and practices of foreign and security policy. Specifically, it identifies two key mechanisms – elite framing and institutionalisation – through which dominant narratives of past violence are integrated into small states' role conceptions.

Mechanism 1: Elite framing of violence as a strategic and moral lesson

The integration of past violence into the national 'autobiographical narrative' (Subotić 2016: 613–615) poses a challenge for all states because of the divisive and destructive nature of violence. For small states, this 'shadow of the past' is arguably even more threatening because constraints on their military, economic and diplomatic resources heighten their sense of vulnerability. For such states, security threats may even extend to the possibility of 'state death' through annexation by foreign powers or through internal divisions and the collapse of state sovereignty.

While the integration of violent episodes into a shared account of the past is anything but unproblematic, it is important to bear in mind that not all experiences of violence are inscribed into collective memory as tragic, negative or traumatic (Lerner 2022: 46–58; Bell 2006: 9–10; Kansteiner 2004: 205–207). Borrowing from Hutchinson's (2009: 402–403) concept of violence as a *mythomoteur*, this paper argues that policy elites construct, and societies endorse, a variety of frames to make sense of past violence. This process is both political, binding the state's citizens into a collective identity, and psychological – geared toward the individual's need to mourn and memorialise (Innes & Steele 2013: 17).

Memory narratives may draw on themes of glory and sacrifice, highlighting victorious outcomes of violence or emphasising the transcendental experience of war, while glossing over physical destruction and social fragmentation (MacMillan 2021: 116, 142; Frazer & Hutchings 2007: 190–191; Schivelbusch 2001: 26). However, even narratives of defeat can unite communities under a collective self-image of victimhood (Bachleitner 2019: 496–497). Moreover, victimhood narratives are often combined with the theme of renewal, thus suggesting that the end of violence provides a moment of catharsis – as illustrated in the rhetoric of a 'zero hour' that followed the defeat of Germany and Japan in World War II (Tischmeyer 2018: 21). The theme of national renewal is powerful because it draws a sharp line between a 'problematic' past and holds out hope for a brighter future (Lebow 2006: 31; Zerubavel 2003a: 89–93; Gillis 1994: 12).

With time, traumatic experiences of violence can also be integrated into successful foreign policy creation. Relevant narratives suggest that societies have come to terms with the past by accepting their collective responsibility (Fogu & Kansteiner 2006: 290; Olick 2003: 278), by making 'adequate apologies' to

victims and by engaging in the diplomacy of guilt (Hall 2015: 118–121; Subotic & Steele 2021: 505; Bell 2009: 356–358; Feuchtwang 2006: 179–181).

Narratives of glory, sacrifice, defeat and renewal are not only backward-looking explanations of the past. They also purport to hold lessons for the present and the future. To make memory narratives usable as a legitimisation for decision-making, however, policy elites need to adapt them to contemporary domestic conditions, current geopolitical circumstances, and the transnational ideological *zeitgeist.* For this reason, collective accounts of past violence always incorporate only certain memories while marginalising others (Feuchtwang 2006: 182; Edkins 2006: 105; Ashplant, Dawson & Roper 2000: 52–53). Wilful forgetting – what Jelin and Kaufman (2000: 106) refer to as the 'presence of absence' – represents the silent corollary to narratives of sacrifice, renewal and responsibility (Fierke 2006: 131).

Mechanism 2: Institutionalisation and contestation of memory narratives

Collectively shared narratives of the past provide guiding principles for interpreting a state's identity, its role(s) in the world, and the behaviours deemed appropriate to those roles. Over time, these role conceptions and the narratives that underpin them become institutionalised – that is, widely accepted as rationality criteria for everyday political practice (Béland 2019: 253; Lepsius 2017: 36–37). Frequently invoked in political discourse and embedded in national security doctrines, they provide incentives for political actors to align their decisions with accepted roles. They also influence organisational designs and resource allocations in the security and diplomatic sectors and serve as evaluative criteria applied to policy outcomes (Adler 2019: 253; Goldstein & Keohane 1993: 20–21; Geertz 1973: 340).

In this way, memory narratives embedded in national role conceptions form a core part of the ideational foundation for small state foreign policies. In the aftermath of destructive violence, policy elites can employ them to respond to security vulnerabilities they perceive on the external, intermestic and domestic levels (Risse 2017: 237; Weyland 2008: 295–296; Legro 2005: 121). First, on the external plane, foreign policy may need to address the sense of vulnerability of a small state recently exposed to the designs of, and conflicts between, larger powers. These fears are not, as IR realism suggests, determined solely by the distribution of material capabilities in the international system but also by collective memories, which foster enemy or friend images vis-à-vis global powers and neighbouring states.

Second, because small states must navigate an international environment dominated by larger powers who can potentially interfere in their domestic affairs through incentives, pressure and sanctions, the boundaries between their external and domestic security tend to be blurred. Small states aim to acquire international status while attempting to avoid or escape undesirable or deviant roles such as 'weak', 'failing' or 'rogue state' because external recognition reduces

risks and confers legitimacy. It may also translate into greater levels of influence in international politics and constitute an important resource in domestic political competition (Carta & Narminio 2021: 345; Risse & Sikkink 2017: 127; Rostoks 2016: 91).

Finally, on a purely domestic level, small states emerging from political violence face the challenge of ideational reconstruction. Violence does not only destroy human lives and property but also renders previously accepted principles regulating trust between the state and its citizens largely meaningless. Foreign occupation, internal conflict and authoritarian repression create rifts that inhibit the ability of a society to function coherently – it shatters, as Hannah Arendt put it, individual capacity for action and thus leads to collective powerlessness (Meyer 2016: 28–29). Reconstructing a stable sense of self reaffirms collective identities. It may help build broad coalitions of power to ensure government stability, repair or gloss over social fragmentation and improve citizens' perception of the state.

The incentives for policy elites to foster broadly accepted interpretations of the past that align with accepted notions of the small state's present and future role in the world are thus clear. However, as pointed out above, collective memory is selective, marginalising or even repressing divergent accounts of the past. These dissenting voices may only survive in niches, but they can form counter-memories that lead to enduring discrepancies between public and private forms of remembering (Kleinfeldt 2019: 95–96; Meyer 2016: 118–119; Bell 2008: 159).

Over time, the gaps and inconsistencies resulting from the simplification of the past provide openings for contestation. By undermining the certainty associated with widely accepted accounts of the past, such 'dangerous memories' (Welch 2007: 123) directly target the coherence and continuity necessary for the conceptualisation of national identity – and the role conceptions associated with this identity (Lebow 2016: 48–50; Cubitt 2007: 210–212, 225–227; Ashplant, Dawson & Roper 2000: 16–20).

National role conceptions in states emerging from periods of violence are thus never fully settled. They exist in a fluid environment of simultaneous reinforcement, contestation and reinterpretation. To examine how these memory-based role conceptions were framed, institutionalised and eventually contested, the next section turns to an account of how policy elites in Greece and Austria linked collective memory to foreign policy strategies during the early Cold War.

Memories of violence and national role conceptions in Greece and Austria during the early Cold War

The foreign policies of Austria and Greece during the Cold War demonstrate that realist accounts of the external behaviour of small states, confined to the binary choice of balancing against or bandwagoning with great powers, are at best incomplete. From the early 1950s through the late 1980s, Austria and Greece

pursued a diverse set of policies that went beyond – and sometimes even counter to – their alignment with the western powers. The empirical record shows that policy elites, in conceptualising and justifying their responses to security crises or to geopolitical openings, frequently drew on national role conceptions that had been formed during the early Cold War. These role conceptions, in turn, were strongly influenced by collective memories of the violence both countries had experienced during the first half of the 20th century.

The post–World War II state and society in Greece and Austria had been shaped by the 'European civil war' (Traverso 2016) that lasted from the early 1910s to the late 1940s. The borders of Greece, for instance, had changed nine times between the Balkan Wars of 1912/1913 and the end of World War II. Its ethnic composition had changed profoundly in the wake of the population exchange with Turkey mandated by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. The country went from a monarchy to a republic in 1924 and then back to a monarchy, which coexisted from 1936 onward with Ioannis Metaxas's quasi-fascist regime. Bitter domestic divisions – a consequence of the 'National Schism' between pro-German political forces and those leaning toward the *Entente* powers in World War I – contributed to social fragmentation that occasionally grew into violent confrontation and political repression (Beaton 2020: 77–78, 205–232; Kostis 2018: 249–251, 287–289; Zelepos 2017: 102–110, 145–148; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 78–96; Tziampiris 2003: 140).

Violence culminated in the brutal occupation regime of the Axis powers during World War II and, subsequently, the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). The human toll of these two conflicts was catastrophic. Half a million Greeks perished during the Axis occupation, including 90 percent of the Jewish population of Salonica. The civil war, which pitted communists and leftists against a government supported by the United Kingdom and the United States, added another 158,000 dead. Among the tragic legacies of the civil war was the fate of 28,000 children, who had been sent abroad by the communist guerillas under a system referred to as *paidomazoma* ('gathering of children'), as well as the forced evacuation of 700,000 Greeks from their villages and the internment of those suspected of communist sympathies on prison islands such as Makronisos and Ai Stratis (Beaton 2020: 268–305; Kostis 2018: 299–310, 314–325; Zelepos 2017: 156–157, 178; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 123–125, 127).

Austria, for its part, had entered the 20th century as a constituent part of the Habsburg empire, which, already weakened by the 'nationalities question', had embarked on a ruinous foreign policy course in the Balkans that came to a head with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in the summer of 1914. The ensuing cataclysmic war led to the collapse of Austria-Hungary and to a twenty-year period of increasingly violent contention between the conservative and socialist political camps in the fledgling first Austrian republic. With its economy in ruins and its borders threatened first by the revisionist designs of the newly

independent states of central Europe and then by Nazi Germany's expansionism, a large part of the population never developed much faith in the viability of this republic (Rathkolb 2021: 220, 225; Rathkolb 2020a: 687–692; Kronenbitter 2017: 84–88; Lassner 2017: 91–105; Beller 2006: 178–184, 199–201, 208–211, 219–221).

Consequently, the 1938 *Anschluss* with Hitler's Germany was welcomed by many Austrians. It proved, however, disastrous for the country's Jewish community. Of the more than 200,000 Jews who lived in Austria in 1938, fewer than 6,000 remained by the end of World War II. More than 65,000 Austrian Jews had been murdered in Nazi concentration camps, along with those persecuted for political reasons, Romani people, prisoners of war and foreign forced labourers. At the same time, Austrians constituted ten percent of *Wehrmacht* soldiers and were disproportionately represented in the combat branch of the Nazi's paramilitary organisation – the *Waffen-SS*. By 1945, more than 200,000 of them had died, and 600,000 were held as Allied prisoners of war (Rathkolb 2021: 269; Rathkolb 2020a: 710–729; Beller 2006: 232–234, 236, 241–242).

The ideological legacies of all this upheaval became manifest in the role conceptions adopted in Austria and Greece during the early Cold War. While both countries had been exposed to high levels of violence, their post-1945 elites framed these experiences in distinctive ways. In Greece, elites interpreted the violence of the first half of the 20th century through the prism of heroic sacrifice. According to this narrative, Greeks had fought valiantly against the threats of hostile foreign interference and internal ideological subversion. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, this two-faced menace came to be symbolised most prominently by the spectre of 'Slavo communism' in southeastern Europe.

Early Austrian Cold War narratives, on the contrary, read the preceding violence through the lens of national victimhood. This frame was constructed not only on the basis of the Allies' 1943 recognition of Austria as the first victim of Nazi Germany but also drew on Austrians' sense of abandonment by the Western powers during the interwar years. This frame of victimhood was paired after 1945 with an elite narrative of renewal, which promoted a national focus on building a better future and on leaving Austria's problematic past behind, largely unexamined and unquestioned.

Policy elites in both countries relied on the narrative frames of sacrifice and renewal to conceptualise and legitimise national security policies. These policies aimed to achieve security across three dimensions: to protect against external threats, to pursue international status and legitimacy, and to advance a notion of national unity that glossed over and suppressed socially divisive memories. As the role conceptions based on a distinct narrative framing of the past came to be institutionalised in conceptions of national security and the structure of foreign and defence policy organisations, they shaped particular policy preferences that would endure in both countries for the entirety of the Cold War and beyond.

Heroes and martyrs: How narratives of sacrifice shaped Greece's Cold War identity and foreign policy

The violence of the first half of the 20th century had deeply marked Greek politics and society. The country emerged from a half-century dominated by the ebb and flow of violence with both an inflated notion of national glory and sacrifice as well as a lingering sense that both internal and external elements were arrayed to threaten the state's security. In response to its international environment during the early Cold War, three distinct role conceptions began to crystallise in Greek political discourse during the early 1950s, which drew heavily on the framing of political violence as heroic sacrifice. This narrative frame, and the ensuing role conceptions, underpinned a Cold War policy discourse that linked national security to military strength and the country's participation in strong regional and global alliances.

Outpost of the 'Free World'

The first of these role conceptions can be read as a reaction to an acute sense of vulnerability, rooted in the experience of foreign interference. It portrayed Greece as an outpost of the 'Free World' in the global confrontation between communism and liberal democracy and premised national security on military capability and strong alliance relations. During the 1940s, the underlying narrative went, Greece had defied first the Axis power through its armed resistance to occupation and then a communist insurgency in the civil war. Both had been costly endeavours, but the price paid by so many Greeks in terms of their lives, health and livelihoods had served a greater good, as they had helped heroically uphold the torch of freedom.

This narrative of glorious sacrifice was, however, tempered by memories of great-power interference in Greek affairs during the first half of the 20th century as well as by uncertainty over the future. The notion of a 'Slavic communist threat from the North' merged old fears with new geopolitical realities. Longstanding concerns about national loyalty, especially in Greek Macedonia and Thrace, resurfaced in Cold War rhetoric. Historical animosity toward Bulgaria – dating back to early 20th-century conflicts and wartime atrocities – intensified fears of regional betrayal (Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 8–9, 47–49, 129; Hatzivassiliou 2006: 6; Dokos 2003: 45). The Greek government repeatedly warned the US of a looming Soviet-bloc invasion and consistently portrayed Greece as the frontline defender of global freedom (Greek Government to US Mission 1947).

Both conservative and liberal politicians viewed communism and Slavic irredentism as the principal threats to Greece's security. NATO membership, eventually achieved in 1952, was seen as necessary for the country's national security but also as in itself insufficient because of Greece's geographical exposure in southeastern Europe and the nature of NATO military plans. Therefore,

conservative Greek governments sought to establish closer bilateral defence ties with the United States – including by offering extensive basing rights – as well as to form a trilateral Balkan Alliance with Yugoslavia and Turkey (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1954; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France 1955; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy 1952; FRUS 1952–1954: 308, 336, 446, 448, 454, 454; Embassy of the FRG in Greece 1960; US Embassy in Greece 1958). During the early Cold War, Greek efforts to strengthen external security were thus directed primarily towards assuring military balancing of the communist threat by strengthening the capacity of its armed forces and building defensive alliances (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1954; Royal Embassy of Greece in the US 1956; Meeting with Messrs. Dulles and Stassen n.d.; FRUS 1952–1954: 277, 446, 454, 456; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France 1955; Embassy of the UK in Greece 1956; NATO 1958).

Centre of Hellenism

A second early–Cold War role conception tied the modern Greek state to the civilisational legacies of its historical predecessors in classical antiquity and the Byzantine Empire. This role conception reflected struggles over the identity of modern Greece since it had gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1830 as well as the state's link to existing diasporas in the eastern Mediterranean region. It thus rested on notions of modern Greek nationalism and irredentism tied to the legacy of the 'Great Idea' – a nationalist vision of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that aimed at uniting all ethnic Greeks in southeastern Europe through territorial expansion (Beaton 2020: 122–129; Veremis & Koliopoulos 2003: 13–14; Tziampiris 2003: 137).

However, Greece's defeat in the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) had terminated the country's ambitions for territorial enlargement and had led to the 'catastrophe of Asia Minor', the displacement of most of the ethnically Greek population from modern-day Turkey. The challenges of integrating these refugees, along with growing fears of communism, prompted a shift in the interwar years toward an insular, homogenising form of Greek nationalism. National identity became tied to cultural and linguistic uniformity, with education policy and settlement strategies used to solidify Greek control in sensitive border areas in the country's north (Zelepos 2017: 120–124; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 7–8, 98; Veremis & Koliopoulos 2003: 16–17).

With the end of World War II, Greece revisited some of its earlier territorial claims and sought to regain areas from Albania and Bulgaria as well as the (Italian-controlled) Dodecanese Islands. Although military force was no longer considered viable, diplomatic efforts continued, driven by the belief that Greece's wartime sacrifices against the Axis powers deserved compensation. Nevertheless, even though Italy agreed to cede the Dodecanese to Greece, the Western Allies

proved otherwise unsympathetic to Greek demands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France 1945; Tayfur 2018: 53; Hatzivassiliou 2006: 6). The misgivings caused in Greece by the failure to advance territorial claims were soon exacerbated by the escalation of the Cyprus crisis.

By the mid-1950s, Greek Cypriot demands for decolonisation and *enosis* (unification) with Greece led to the rise of armed resistance against British colonial rule and to the deterioration of intercommunal relations between ethnic Greeks and Turks on the island. In turn, Cyprus became a major issue in Greek foreign policy and domestic politics. The centre-left parliamentary opposition in Athens developed a doctrine of Greece as a 'national centre' of Hellenism, implying a government duty of protection not only for citizens of the modern Greek state but also for ethnic Greeks left outside this state by the territorial settlements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Greek advocacy of the right for Cypriots to self-determination strained the country's relations with Turkey, the United Kingdom and ultimately the United States as well. When a centre-left government eventually came to power in Athens in 1963/1964, tensions over Cyprus brought Greece to the brink of war with Turkey and called into question the country's strategic alignment with US and NATO Cold War objectives (Beaton 2020: 308–321; Zelepos 2017: 189–196; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 131–133; Hatzivassiliou 2006: 51; Coufoudakis 2003: 111).

The anti-communist state

The third role conception portrayed Greece as a quintessentially anti-communist state, thus refracting domestic divisions through the prism of superpower confrontation. This role conception was based on a polarising discourse that described post–civil war Greece as a 'besieged nation' (Veremis & Koliopoulos 2003: 18) that had to contend with communist threats from both within and beyond its borders. The political Right, arrogating to itself alone the duty of protecting the state, targeted the outlawed Communist Party and systematically excluded its sympathisers from political and social life. The defeat of the political Left in the Greek Civil War was thus not just military but political and social as well.

The deeply entrenched enemy image of the Left polarised post-war Greek politics. The vaguely defined concept of *ethnikofrosyni* (national mindedness) became a prerequisite for political and social participation, with applicants for positions in the civil service and the armed forces required to procure certificates of good conduct from the Security Police. At the same time, public and political discourse remained silent about two significant aspects of World War II and the Greek Civil War. The first of these was that resistance to the Axis powers had, to a very significant extent, depended on the activities of left-wing and communist groups, which were essentially written out of the country's recent history, while many of those later fighting on the government side during the civil war had col-

laborated in a more or less active fashion with the occupiers. The second aspect concerned the fact that, while atrocities had been carried out by both sides in the civil war, including against the civilian population, only the crimes of the insurgency received significant attention and punishment in the conflict's aftermath (Vournas 1963; Kostis 2018: 331–336, 423–430; Zelepos 2017: 179–181; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 115–116; Bellou 2003: 158–159).

The marginalisation of the political Left nurtured two related narratives within segments of the population who felt that their sacrifice during the Axis occupation was not validated and that they themselves were persecuted for their ideological sympathies. On the one hand, the dominance of the political Right and its strong links to the military security services encouraged resentment against the so-called *parakratos* (shadow state), an informal network of military officers, conservative politicians and nationalist groups that evaded democratic oversight (Tayfur 2018: 51; Kostis 2018: 336–338; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 7). On the other side, the tendency of NATO to overlook anti-democratic tendencies in Greece fanned the myth of a shadowy 'foreign factor' *(xenos paragontas)* controlling the country from behind the scenes and skewing its national interest. This myth was based on the conspicuous presence of American military and civilian personnel, large inflows of aid money and the very real influence they had on political and economic life in early Cold War Greece. A note of the French foreign service remarked that into the early 1950s, US 'tutelage' over Greece was absolute and 'obvious even to the uninformed' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France 1955).

Over time, in the interstices between publicly promoted role conceptions and the private memories of many individuals, resentment simmered against personal marginalisation and the sense of overbearing foreign influence. Though the counter-narrative of Greece as an 'underdog country' exploited for the sake of great power interests with the willing participation of domestic conservative political forces remained latent during the early Cold War years, it exacerbated domestic political instability and created the basis for a potent challenge to dominant national role conceptions. It eventually burst onto the political scene in the mid-1970s after the fall of the Greek military junta (1967–1974) and ushered in a radical reframing of Greece's geopolitical alignment and national role (Bellou 2003: 159; Diamandouros 1993: 3–7).

Victims and peacebuilders: How Austrian narratives of renewal forged Cold War neutrality policy

Violence had changed Austria fundamentally during the first half of the 20th century. After World War I, a weak state emerged from the rubble of the Habsburg Empire. It was politically divided, economically unstable and regarded by a large part of the population and policy elites as merely a steppingstone toward unification with Germany. The turbulent years of the interwar period prompted a major-

ity of Austrians to welcome the *Anschluss* (unification) with Nazi Germany in 1938. After the end of World War II, Austria was divided into four occupation zones. The growing disputes between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union made a quick resolution of the Austrian question impossible and led to a decade of Allied occupation. During this time, policy elites developed dominant role conceptions that rested on a framing of Austrians' experience during the interwar years, World War II and the occupation period as undifferentiated victimhood.

The conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955 and the related adoption of military neutrality represented, according to this narrative, a clear break with the past and a renewal of the national community and its role in the world. Austria's strategic preferences during the Cold War reflected the framing of past violence as tragic and traumatic: They prioritised multilateral diplomacy and the maintenance of constructive relations with both sides amid bipolar confrontation, while minimising the role of military force as a tool of foreign policy.

Security through neutrality

The first role conception – of Austria as a neutral state between the blocs of superpower confrontation – strongly reflected this sense of a turn away from unsuccessful earlier attempts to ensure national security. Gehler (2017: 328) detects in the interwar years the roots of a quadruple Austrian trauma: first, the myth of the state's economic non-viability, rooted in the travails of the First Republic (1918–1938); second, its dependence on external powers; third, the deep mistrust between social democrats and Christian socials; and fourth, the end of national independence as a result of the 1938 *Anschluss*. Finding a constructive resolution for Austria's security dilemma as a small state wedged in between large blocs of power thus represented a key goal of post-war Austrian politics.

Austria's preference for western alignment emerged very quickly. Fear of the Soviet Union dominated within the major political parties and among the population, especially in the eastern part of Austria, which suffered under the brutal occupation regime of the Red Army. Even though studies of the archival record have found no evidence that the USSR intended to partition Austria (Bischof & Ruggenthaler 2022: 72–73; Rathkolb 2021: 10–11; Mueller 2017: 349), both the governments in Vienna and Washington considered the country as particularly threatened by communism. Consequently, the US extended generous aid under the Marshall Plan to Austria and, after the communist coup in Czechoslovakia of 1948, also supported the country's rearmament (Bischof & Wineroither 2023: 631; Bischof & Ruggenthaler 2022: 60–67; Rathkolb 2021: 9–11, 42; Rathkolb 2017: 322; Beller 2006: 252–253; Gehler 2005: 84).

In spring 1955, an Austrian delegation at the highest level visited Moscow and made a political commitment to future military neutrality in exchange for Soviet agreement to the finalisation of a State Treaty that would grant Austria full sovereignty and the withdrawal of all occupation troops. Subsequently, the narrative

of neutrality 'having bought' the country's unity and freedom took hold, and the passing of the Neutrality Act by parliament in October 1955 became an integral part of the myth of a new beginning (Bischof & Ruggenthaler 2022: 109–110; Rathkolb 2021: 193–194; Rathkolb 2017: 321; Gehler 2005: 79, 133–134).

This myth was further cemented when, barely a year after Austria committed itself to military neutrality, an uprising against communist rule broke out in neighbouring Hungary. Despite fears that disorder could spill across the border, that the Soviet army marching into Hungary might violate Austria's sovereignty and that the Hungarian Revolution could trigger a larger conflict between the superpowers, the events of fall 1956 led to a positive evaluation of the benefits of neutrality. While insisting that Austria scrupulously upheld its military neutrality – and refuting accusations from Moscow and Soviet satellite states over the alleged delivery of weapons to insurgents through Austria – the country's political leadership called on the Soviet Union to end the bloodshed in Hungary and respect the rights of the civilian population (Office of the Federal Chancellor 1956a). Further, Austria played a constructive role in providing humanitarian assistance (Office of the Austrian Federal Chancellor 1956b; Office of the Austrian Federal Chancellor 1956c; Office of the Austrian Federal Chancellor 1956d; Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations in New York 1956; Granville 2017: 146) and in trying to find a solution to the crisis through multilateral diplomacy in the framework of the United Nations.

At the same time, the Soviet reaction to the events in Hungary made it clear that Austria – whose borders with communist and socialist states extended over more than 1,000 kilometers – would have to find a way to navigate the cross-pressures emanating from its wish to belong culturally and politically to the 'free world' and the simultaneous Soviet demands for a strict adherence to a neutral stance. The country's ability to participate in the project of European integration spurred by the signing of the 1957 Rome Treaty, for instance, was constrained by such realpolitik considerations. Thus, making a virtue out of necessity, throughout the Cold War Austrian policy elites framed military neutrality as a cornerstone of the country's security. Over the following decades, neutrality was eventually idealised by all political camps as the basis of Austria's post-1945 success story.

International peacebuilder

The second role conception to emerge in the mid-1950s was also linked to the narrative of renewal and sought to forge a positive image of Austria within the international community while also seeking to strengthen identification of citizens with the state. It rested on an intense engagement in processes of multilateral diplomacy and international conflict mediation. Contrary to the Swiss model of neutrality, Austria joined the United Nations in December 1955 and quickly became an active member, as indicated by its commitment to a

diplomatic solution to the Hungarian crisis. From the 1960s onward, Austrian governments regularly dispatched 'blue helmets' for UN peacekeeping forces and successfully advocated for Vienna as the third seat of UN organisations after New York and Geneva.

Austria's international engagement was subsumed under the concept of 'active neutrality'. It included efforts to promote détente in Europe – by pursuing constructive relations with Austria's neighbouring socialist countries in central-eastern Europe and by hosting superpower summits, such as the 1961 Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting in Vienna – as well as the establishment of contacts with leaders of the non-aligned countries and of newly decolonised states across the Global South (Senn, Eder & Kornprobst 2023: 5; Rathkolb 2021: 195–199; Gehler & Bischof 2017: 6–7; Nowotny 2017: 28; Gehler 2005: 295). In short, Austrian policy elites strove to construct a favourable image for their country and demonstrate its 'usefulness' as an active and reliable member of the international community (Eder 2023: 291–292; Rathkolb 2021: 296; Gehler 2005: 447, 458). In this way, they sought to secure Austria's sovereignty in between the blocs of Cold War confrontation.

At the same time, international status also bolstered the identification of Austrian citizens with their country. Even though Austrians were in general not more interested in matters of foreign policy and diplomacy than those of other states, it is safe to assume that positive media coverage of their politicians' contacts with world leaders contributed to a positive national self-conception and supported the project of Austrian 'nation-building' that policy elites had embarked upon after 1945, especially by seeking to clearly differentiate Austria historically and culturally from Germany (Rathkolb 2021: 13; Karner 2005: 416–417; Thaler 1999: 294). They conveyed a feeling that Austria, despite its small size and checkered recent past, had returned to the centre of world politics – and, this time, as a force for good. As Gehler and Bischof (2017: 6) put it, 'if Austria was no longer a great power, it became a darling of the world'.

First victim of Nazi Germany

The narrative of renewal underpinning the above two role conceptions was tied closely to a second narrative frame, namely that of Austria as the first victim of German aggression in the late 1930s. This narrative of victimhood drew on the declaration of the 1943 Moscow Conference, which had described Austria as the 'first free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression' (Moscow Conference 1943), but also on the sentiment, widespread in 1945, that the Western community of states had forced unwanted independence on Austria after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918 and had then refused to protect it from aggressive German designs in the 1930s (Bischof 2017: 131–132; Gehler 2017: 328–329; Gehler 2005: 26).

From the perspective of post-war Austrian political elites, many of whom had been persecuted by the Nazis, the claim to victimhood was to an extent justified

(Bischof 2017: 117; Beller 2006: 105, 265; Gehler 2005: 93–94). But among the Austrian population, who had in their majority welcomed or at least accepted the 1938 *Anschluss* and had subsequently contributed to Nazi war crimes and the genocide of European Jews, the victimhood myth was also adopted in undifferentiated form. Austrians pointed to the plight of *Wehrmacht* soldiers either dead or held as prisoners of war, to the civilian victims of bombing raids as well as of Red Army reprisals, and to the general misery and deprivation of the immediate post-war years (Rathkolb 2021: 13–14; Gehler 2005: 141).

In addition, the Allied occupation lasting for ten years after the end of World War II also contributed to the victimhood narrative. In Austrian public memory, the decade 1945–1955 became fixed as 'occupation time', and the year 1955 as the moment of liberation. Thus, Austria 'became free' in the collective consciousness, not in 1945 as a result of the Allied defeat of Hitler's Germany, but ten years later, when it was 'liberated' from Allied occupation. In fact, one of the most prominent images of the post-war period in Austria is that of the foreign minister appearing on the balcony of the Belvedere Palace in Vienna in May 1955, commenting on the signing of the State Treaty with the words 'Austria is free' (Rathkolb 2020b: 756–757; Rathkolb 2021: 7–8; Beller 2006: 250).

The narrative of victimhood thus was shaped by the experiences of the *Wehrmacht*, the 'homefront' generation and the occupation period. Allowing all Austrians to style themselves as victims had a harmonising social effect. In addition, it also facilitated the reconciliation of the conservative and socialist political camps, whose bitter rivalry in the interwar years had escalated into a short-lived civil war in the early 1930s and contributed to the establishment of an authoritarian, 'Austrofascist' regime in 1934 (Rathkolb 2020a: 692–701; Lassner 2017: 91–92; Beller 2006: 203–205, 209–223).

However, the success of consociational democracy in Austria after 1945 came at the expense of marginalising the memory of victims and survivors of the Holocaust. According to the prevalent legal doctrine, Austria had ceased to exist as a sovereign state in March 1938. It could thus not be held legally responsible for German crimes and, consequently, was not liable to pay war damages or restitution to those persecuted by the Nazis (Beller 2006: 259; Gehler 2005: 50–51, 390–391). Similarly, the question of Austria's – and Austrians' – moral historical responsibility for Nazi crimes went largely unexamined for decades. A public reckoning with this question set in only once it was revealed during the presidential election campaign of 1986 that one of the contenders, Kurt Waldheim, had publicly lied about his service record in the *Wehrmacht* (Rathkolb 2021: 23–24, 124–125; Beller 2006: 287; Gehler 2005: 540–542).

The international ripple effects of the 'Waldheim affair', most notably the American decision to put Waldheim on a watch list of persons refused entry to the United States, contributed to a wider societal debate about Austrian responsibility

for World War II and the Holocaust (Huemer 2008; Gehler 2005: 443–544). In the following years, the Austrian government repudiated the doctrine of unqualified Austrian victimhood and eventually established a national fund to compensate the surviving victims of the Nazi regime (Cede & Mangott 2023: 573; Beller 2006: 304).

Table 1: Post–World War II memory narratives, role conceptions and policy outcomes in Austria and Greece

Dimensions of small-state security		**Greece** Narrative of heroic sacrifice	**Austria** Narrative of victimhood and renewal
External security	Role conception	Outpost of the 'Free World'	Security through Neutrality
	Policy outcome	Military balancing	Military neutrality
Status	Role conception	Defender of Hellenes	International peacebuilder
	Policy outcome	Civilisational nationalism	Focus on multilateral diplomacy
Domestic unity	Role conception	Anti-communist state	First victim of Nazi Germany
	Policy outcome	Polarising division	Undifferentiated denial of responsibility

Source: Author

Implications and conclusion

The empirical analysis of Greek and Austrian national role conceptions during the Cold War shows that collective memories of violence shape small states' foreign policy strategies in diverse and enduring ways. Both countries had been implicated in, and suffered from, the continental 'civil war' that had engulfed most of Europe during the first decades of the 20th century. Unsurprisingly, memories of this period loomed large in policy elites' conceptualisations of the geopolitical environment they operated in, the threats and challenges they faced both externally and internally, and the role their country could play in international politics. The end of World War II, as well as, respectively, of the Greek Civil War in summer 1949 and of the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955, signified not only a critical juncture in their foreign policy trajectories but also an opportunity to rhetorically fix a new 'founding moment' (Hutchinson 2009: 402–403) for the imagined communities of the Austrian and Greek nations.

Despite the destructive legacy of violence in terms of human lives and material resources, the empirical analysis demonstrates that its narrative was not unequivocally tragic. In the case of Greece, recent political violence was read

largely through a lens of glorious sacrifice. It suggested both pride in the heroism of those who had 'defended democracy' as well as the claim to the idea of an Hellenic civilisational and cultural space extending beyond the confines of the modern Greek state. This reading facilitated a polarising world view during the early Cold War that drew sharp distinctions between friends and enemies, both within and outside the state. In turn, this conceptualisation of a world divided into irreconcilable ideological blocs gave rise to a preference for military instruments to safeguard national security.

In Austria, on the other hand, post-war policy elites sought a clean break with a recent past characterised by a failure to uphold national security either in terms of maintaining internal cohesion or warding off external threats. The doctrine of neutrality, even though it was originally imposed on the country as a condition for Soviet agreement to the conclusion of the State Treaty, turned over time into a cornerstone of Austria's identity, based on a harmonising narrative that sought to reduce and gloss over ideological fault lines both within the state and with its external partners. Neutrality offered an identity marker for the population, signalling a clear demarcation from (West) Germany, with whom so much of Austrian history had been closely, and problematically, intertwined. Furthermore, in its guise of 'active neutrality', Austria's post-war international status also gave the country a ticket for re-entry onto the world stage as a valued intermediary between the ideological blocs.

The empirical analysis also reveals that memory is not merely a passive inheritance from the past. Instead, it constitutes a dynamic resource for policy elites to reshape national roles over time and thus legitimise their strategic choices. The opportunities for such memory entrepreneurship are frequently found in the interstices between officially sanctioned 'public' accounts of the past and the more private and sometimes antagonistic collections of individuals and marginalised groups. National role conceptions and the policy preferences they underlie thus always remain fluid and contested: They are continuously (re)constructed and mobilised to conceptualise, explain and legitimise policy choices.

In Greece, the polarising narrative of the anti-communist state collapsed in the wake of the military dictatorship (1967–1974), when the political Left became fully enfranchised in the country's political community. Once anti-communism crumbled as the ideological basis of the state, narratives of Greece as an exploited 'underdog' came to the fore, and in their wake, Greece's foreign policy alignment changed rather sharply. Austria's harmonising narrative, which had stylised all Austrians as victims of German aggression, survived for another decade. However, by the mid-1980s, as a new generation of political leaders, who had neither direct implications nor recollections of the war, took over the helm of government and also pursued full integration into the European Community (EC), the country belatedly began to face up to its historical responsibility.

The analytical framework proposed in this article advances scholarly understanding on the link between collective memory and international politics by clarifying the causal mechanisms through which memory narratives, once clearly framed and institutionalised over time, produce specific policy preferences. The empirical findings illuminate how elites in small states leverage collective memory to design and justify policy decisions. Thus, they suggest that IR scholars should attend more closely to the discursive and organisational dimensions of memory, as they form a powerful resource for small states navigating complex and often precarious positions in the global order.

Given the limited scope of this article, its findings also invite reflection on the ways in which lessons from the past have guided small states' policy in temporal and geographical contexts other than that of the Cold War in Europe. For small European states in the 1950s, the intermingling of international and domestic violence constituted the predominant memory of the preceding decades. Future studies may examine, by contrast, how the experience of violence was framed in the decolonising states of the Global South from the 1950s to the 1970s and the role conceptions and policy preferences that flowed from these frames.

Research may also take into account that memory practices and narratives are increasingly shaped not only within national frameworks but also in transnational contexts. The process of European integration, for instance, has revealed tensions between purely national recollection and efforts at creating shared historical memories as a basis for policymaking. Future research may examine the ways in which memory narratives influence contemporary debates within (small) member states on the EU's common foreign and security policy. Recognising memory as a dynamic and contested resource will thus open new avenues for understanding the complexity of small state behaviour in international politics by paying greater attention to the interplay of history, identity and strategic choice.

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Research article

Beyond a Single Purpose: The Complex Reasons Behind International Sanctions

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Abstract
Sanctions are increasingly imposed in response to international crises and military conflicts. Much is known about the aims sanctions seek to achieve, such as coercion, deterrence and signalling, yet the catalysts for their imposition are often overlooked. Despite the existence of a sanctions framework developed for specific international concerns, each sanctions programme has a justification unique to it. In my paper, I present a novel argument that a 'menu' of justifications exists for the implementation of international sanctions. This 'sanctions à la carte' includes five sets of justifications for imposition: crime-based, value-based, hostile sanctions, countermeasures and war sanctions. Understanding the varied nature of these sanctions frameworks compels us to reconsider the existing models of examining sanctions' effectiveness, legitimacy and proportionality.

Keywords: *international sanctions, sanctions, G7 sanctions, sanctions justification, EU sanctions, US sanctions*

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Introduction

Writing on the effectiveness of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions, Biersteker, Tourinho and Eckert drew a distinction between the purpose of sanctions and their objectives. The purpose of sanctions can be understood through a three-fold model that includes: (1) coercing a change in behaviour; (2) constraining the target's behaviour; and (3) signalling international wrongdoing (Biersteker, Tourinho & Eckert 2016).

In an earlier article Biersteker, Tourinho and Eckert grouped the UNSC sanctions within nine 'general objectives [such measures] seek to achieve' (Biersteker et al. 2013: 14) and listed the following: ending armed conflict, human rights, democracy support, counter-terrorism, good governance, support of the judicial process, non-proliferation, support for humanitarian efforts and protecting the population under R2P (Biersteker et al. 2013: 14). As we observe a significant downscaling in the role and place of UNSC sanctions, new international actors, including the G7 and EU, are substituting the UNSC niche in crafting international sanctions (Moret 2022).

While this transformation takes place, changes relating to the principles applied to sanctions also become apparent. Within the framework of this study, I suggest regrouping sanctions not only by their purpose or goal, their objective or aim, but by the rationale for their imposition. The sanctions rationale can also be expressed as the form of their official justification. Giumelli explained that each sanctions programme, whether related to Libya, Al-Qaeda, Sudan or others, has 'very specific characteristics . . . [and] the reasons behind their imposition need to be clear' (Giumelli 2016). He identified the purpose of sanctions as a key marker for such specification.

Yet, while the goals or objectives of sanctions may significantly change over time, the sanctions rationale, the justification for their imposition, usually remains constant and can serve as a more reliable distinguishing factor for such specification. These justifications for sanctions, if properly grouped and categorised, lead to different consequences for a broad range of sanctions-related matters, such as the assessment of their effectiveness (Jones and Portela 2020: 40), legitimacy (Beaucillon 2021: 1–17), proportionality (Hofer 2020) and the various forms of international sanctions (Cameron and Moiseienko 2021). How this regrouping can be organised, what methodology should be applied for differentiation and how it affects the consequences of sanctions imposition constitute the broad spectrum of questions this paper addresses.

Why now, and why is it relevant? With the gradual shift of the international sanctions agenda from the UN Security Council to the G7 (plus the EU) platform, the previous classifications, while still useful, offer limited practical guidance to practitioners, state officials and other stakeholders in addressing the most

pressing issues related to sanctions delivery, implementation, enforcement and communication. These pressing issues include, but are not limited to, the following three questions.

First, how can sanctions be made effective and achieve their goals in the most efficient way? Political leaders often assume that imposed sanctions will be effective, yet scholarly literature offers a more critical perspective (Jones and Portela 2020). Researchers traditionally explore how effective these sanctions are in terms of achieving foreign policy aims, such as changing behaviour, regime change, deterrence or inflicting damage (Gary Clyde Hufbauer et al. 2008). Studies also revisit the political outcomes in the targeted state (Jones 2015). There remains an open question – one that is crucial to address: What defines the effectiveness of sanctions, and can the concept of efficacy be applied in the same way to sanctions whose imposition was justified on entirely different grounds? All models that examine sanctions effectiveness disregard the factor of the rationale (justification) applied to a particular sanctions programme (Gary Clyde Hufbauer et al. 2008).[1] This paper shows that the approaches to assess effectiveness have to weigh such justification to deliver the correct results. By adjusting the models to account for justification, we gain a more precise understanding of the conditions under which sanctions are likely to be successful or not.

Second, the legality and legitimacy of sanctions represent one of the broadest areas of sanctions research, thoroughly examined by both scholars and practitioners (Boulden and Charron 2010: 9). However, the literature rarely articulates clearly that legal principles are applied differently to each specific sanctions regime, depending on its underlying justification (Happold 2016: 3, 8, 11).[2] In addition, the question of the legitimacy of sanctions is considered far from being fully settled (J. van den Herik and van Bergeijk 2023: 10). In this paper I show that while one rationale may allow a broader scope for judicial protection and ways to challenge the sanctions decision, another may significantly limit the capacity to appeal such a designation.

Third, proportionality is another aspect closely linked to sanctions. In many studies, scholars argue that certain sanctions programmes exceed proportionality criteria by harming civilian populations or causing unintended adverse humanitarian consequences (Ashley 2021). However, the rationale behind the imposition of sanctions is often overlooked or omitted, making it difficult

1 This is, so far, the most credible, respected and widely cited work on the topic. Yet it does not differentiate between sanctions based on varying justification frameworks, treating the targeting of narcotics groups and the sanctioning of Iran as if they fall within the same analytical category.

2 Happold critically examined all aspects of the debate over the lawfulness of coercive measures (2016: 3), including whether sanctions harm human rights (ibid.: 8) and whether the legitimacy of sanctions can be contested (ibid.: 11).

to accept findings that apply a uniform proportionality test to all sanctions, regardless of their justification. I argue that the first task should be to clearly define the justification for a given sanctions regime, and only then proceed to assess its proportionality. Otherwise, we risk applying the same proportionality standards to fundamentally different cases (Hofer 2020),[3] such as sanctions against drug cartels and those against Russia in response to aggression, which are not comparable. Hence, while there are certainly more aspects and angles from which sanctions are investigated as an interdisciplinary topic, these four approaches are identified as key to understanding why justification, and its variations, is a *sine qua non* for the study of sanctions.

Given that it means regrouping the classification of sanctions based on their rationale (justification), this approach may lead to a rethinking of many existing concepts and studies. Traditionally, aside from a few exceptions, sanctions are treated in the same way, regardless of the reasons for which they were imposed. Effectiveness is primarily assessed based on the stated goals of sanctions: target-related goals (Jones & Portela 2020); legitimacy is often evaluated through the lens of whether sanctions are unilateral or multilateral (Beaucillon 2021); and proportionality is considered independently of specific sanctions regimes, whether targeting a state like Russia or non-state actors such as drug cartels, as mentioned earlier. With the help of my regrouping of the existing classification of sanctions based on their justification, we can reevaluate current academic studies and provide practitioners with a more tangible categorisation – one that, when applied, can adjust the parameters related to the aforementioned aspects of sanctions and, more importantly, help manage expectations surrounding them.

The classification of sanctions based on their justification is the novel argument this paper brings to the discussion. The source that inspired my categorisation stems from Moisieienko's work on crime-based sanctions, which, for the first time, credibly addressed a specific type of sanctions justification as separate from other justifications used to impose sanctions. My paper goes beyond this single justification of crime-based sanctions identified by Moisieienko, expanding on it to formulate a framework of five distinct justifications.

3 Hofer considers sanctions as retorsions, countermeasures and collective countermeasures, and reviews whether such measures are proportionate or not. It remains unclear how the author accounts for the differing factors that affect proportionality when such measures are enacted, for instance, against drug cartels by the US or in response to the situation in Niger by the EU. Questions such as whether these sanctions are proportional, and how to adjust the proportionality test between such fundamentally different sanctions regimes, remain unaddressed. As further explored in my paper, proportionality cannot be meaningfully assessed without taking into account the context of justification.

The first justification, based on Moisieienko's work, assumes that sanctions are imposed as a substitute for ordinary criminal proceedings, serving as an attempt by the sender authority to address criminal behaviour more broadly. In other words, such sanctions can be grouped under the category of 'crime-based sanctions' (Moiseienko 2024). The second justification implies that sanctions are introduced as a tool to protect fundamental values, such as human rights, the protection of democracy and the maintenance of the rule of law.[4] Examples include the Magnitsky sanctions regimes or UN sanctions imposed on Haiti (Franck 1992). The third justification can be expressed as hostile sanctions, as exemplified by US sanctions against Cuba (Office of Foreign Assets Control, United States. Department of the Treasury 2022) or Russian sanctions against US or EU officials (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022). The fourth justification can be described as countermeasures, which I maintain always qualify as sanctions, though not all sanctions, by their legal nature, constitute countermeasures. That said, if the specific justification for their imposition is explicitly stated as a response to a breach of international obligations, such measures may be properly referred to as countermeasures. The fifth and final category refers to sanctions whose enactment is justified by war or acts of aggression. I define these as war-based sanctions rationale. Non-UN-based sanctions in response to aggression are a novel factor in international relations, quite distinct from the sanctions frameworks related to Syria or Afghanistan; therefore, engagement with them should follow a different approach (J. van den Herik and van Bergeijk 2023: 21).

In the following sections, I address the question of methodology: How I determine which justification a given sanctions programme is based on. I describe each of the five sanctions justifications in depth, including how each specific justification affects effectiveness, legitimacy and proportionality, and I conclude with key findings.

Methodology

In this section, I explain how and why justifications can be grouped and differentiated, and the objective criteria I use to distinguish them. The imposition of international sanctions typically follows a three-stage process.

First, the sanctioning body or government (the sanctions sender) imposes sanctions to address specific international situations that raise concern (the trigger

4 During the presentation of my draft paper at the Geneva International Sanctions Network on 24 May 2024, some participants noted that, in terms of values, there is a significant difference between what the G7 states stand for and the positions of countries in the Middle East or other regions. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, the notion of values will be based primarily on how the G7 defines its core principles: human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

stage). In doing so, the sanctions sender provides a clear rationale (justification) for the imposition of sanctions (Nanopoulos 2020: 28). Next, the sender sets its objectives for the sanctions regime to be regarded as successful. Success in achieving these objectives is measured through the lens of foreign policy aims (Council of the European Union 2022). Last, sanction senders periodically review the outcomes of the sanctions and assess whether their foreign policy aims have been met or whether these aims have changed, making the sanctions no longer necessary. The second step is closely linked to the third, as foreign policy aims are subject to ongoing modifications, and the assessment of the success of sanctions outcomes largely depends on evolving political objectives (Charron & Portela 2016: 111).

The first step in sanctions imposition, involving justification, has been unfairly overlooked, despite the fact that this step, to put it bluntly, has major consequences. Stated otherwise, the implications for effectiveness, legitimacy and proportionality differ from one sanctions regime to another if the justification used for their imposition varies. Understanding what a sanctions justification is does not require a streamlined process, but rather a cumulative approach that takes into account a number of factors with different legal characteristics and value. As a first step, we need to answer the question: What international situation triggered the imposition of sanctions? For example, if the activities of drug cartels are the trigger and the sanctioning authority aims to disrupt money laundering schemes linked to illicit networks, this reflects one type of justification. Alternatively, if the trigger is fraudulent elections in Belarus, and the sender seeks to condemn the violation of democratic procedures, that reflects another. Or the sanctions may be driven by domestic policy considerations, as in the case of sanctions imposed against the ICC Prosecutor (The White House 2025).

In the second step, to determine the proper framework of justification, we need to carefully examine the official communication that follows the imposition of sanctions. In the case of the EU, statements on sanctions imposition typically accompany the sanctions decision, outlining the key objectives of the regime and the aims being pursued. For example, the EU's sanctions against Russia clearly cite 'unprovoked military aggression' as the official reason for their imposition. Similarly, US countermeasures against Russia often include explicit references to specific breaches, such as Russia's failure to comply with an international agreement. In some cases, however, no detailed official justification is provided, only a general statement that sanctions were imposed due to 'unfriendly actions towards Russia', as seen in the case of Russian sanctions targeting US or EU officials.

The third step in my assessment involves examining the official legal texts and how they are framed in terms of the justification for sanctions imposition. Certain sanctions regulations state clearly that the violation of specific international norms serves as the legal basis for imposing further individual sanctions. These varying

legal frameworks often entail distinct systems for listing and delisting, reflecting the underlying justification and procedural approach (Biersteker and Niederberger 2022).[5] For instance, a war-based rationale commonly utilises 'status-based designations' whereas 'value-based sanctions' tend to target individuals or entities for actions that infringe on human rights (Bernatskyi 2024). Evidently, delisting principles differ enormously: Ending the aggression can serve as a sanctions relief (Biersteker 2023),[6] while relief from value-based sanctions is, rather, a moral question.

Last but not least, the assessment and identification of a concrete justification framework includes evaluation of the scale and scope of the sanctions measures adopted. This is why, later in the paper, I make a distinction between value-based sanctions and war sanctions, as their scope, magnitude and latitude are not comparable. When sender states protect values, they usually tend to have a narrow list of individuals under sanctions. In the case of a war-based sanctions justification, as a rule sender states go far beyond targeting whole sectors of the economy.

It should be noted that, as this study applies an interdisciplinary method to investigate sanctions, it is not limited to normative or legal criteria alone. It also considers sanctions more broadly, encompassing aspects such as the political intent behind their imposition and their design, whether they are broad or narrow.

The hostile act category is based on its legal justification, while value-based sanctions are defined by their normative foundation or intent. Moiseienko rightly noted that isolating crime-based sanctions from other types of sanctions is a complex task (Moiseienko 2024). He struggled to define the 'boundary' between crime-based and other sanctions' 'leitmotifs', concluding that in certain instances, the differentiation might be impossible. However, he added that the legal character of crime-based and other sanctions, whatever differentiation exists, should still be described (Moiseienko 2024). This paper suggests that justifications may overlap;

5 The authors discuss how delisting could aid mediation goals such as democratisation, ending conflicts or restoring the rule of law. However, as is further analysed in this paper, the approach to delisting as a trade-off for certain concessions is more feasible for 'value-based' sanctions. The 'crime-based' framework, which targets entities like narcotics cartels, rarely allows for negotiations with sanctioning bodies. This is also true for 'hostile' sanctions against Iran, which saw no substantive delisting efforts during the Trump era. Sanctions relief with Belarus, offered by the EU to facilitate diplomatic talks between Kyiv and Moscow in the Minsk format, was perceived more as a fault than an achievement. The full reversal of sanctions following the sham elections of the president of Belarus in 2020 only exacerbated this perception.

6 Additionally, the mechanism of sanctions relief often depends on the presence of conflict. In cases of crime-based sanctions, the aim is to disrupt criminal activities rather than address a conflict. This paper does not explore the complexities of peace talks and the associated lifting of sanctions in depth. However, it's important to note that in situations involving war sanctions, such as the conflict over the Falkland Islands, no sanctions relief was granted until after a successful military operation and the de-occupation of the islands.

however, there is always a primary driving rationale, and the analysis relies on identifying and interpreting that dominant justification.

While one programme may have been developed initially with a value-based justification and remained so throughout its effective period, another may not have followed the same path. This suggests that a transformation of the underlying rationale can rarely occur, one clear example being the US sanctions against Iran. These sanctions were initially imposed with a value-based justification on the basis of gross human rights violations[7] and non-proliferation concerns.[8] However, under the first Trump presidency, they quickly evolved into hostile sanctions, primarily aimed at expressing disapproval of the Iranian government, even at the cost of undermining the JCPOA (Serre 2020).

When sanctions are imposed to combat high-level corruption, we can see an overlap between value-based and crime-based justifications. For instance, the UK applies 'Magnitsky' sanctions both 'to address serious abuses and violations of human rights globally' and 'to tackle serious corruption' (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office 2024: 12). Therefore, in this case, it may not be evident which primary rationale applies (Nicolazzo et al. 2024: 22). Nonetheless, I tend to place human rights sanctions regimes under the value-based justification, as I believe the driving factor is the protection of the global human rights agenda rather than the targeting of a few individual perpetrators. The deterrent effect they create should, in principle, contribute to the preservation of human rights worldwide by instilling a fear of being sanctioned. However, this particular case may be difficult to assess with complete precision.

The selection of specific sanctions episodes highlighted in this study focuses on the sanctions practices of G7 members and the EU, with particular emphasis on the sanctions programmes of the United States, UK and EU. A key novelty of this study is that it is based on an assessment of sanctions programmes as a whole, rather than on individual designations or sanctions episodes (Biersteker, Tourinho, and Eckert 2016). While Portela and Charron examined various sanctions datasets used by political scientists and economists to evaluate sanctions efficacy, this study offers an additional example of how sanctions can be grouped and structured in an interdisciplinary manner, contributing further to the ongoing discussion on sources and methodologies for studying sanctions (Portela and Charron 2022).

The tables in the coming sections illustrate how often each jurisdiction (the United States and the EU) applies different types of sanctions rationales,

7 For instance, Executive Order 13553 was imposed on officials of the Government of Iran and other persons acting on behalf of the Government of Iran determined to be responsible for or complicit in certain serious human rights abuses.

8 For example, ISA, which was subject to termination 'if Iran ceases its efforts to acquire WMD and is removed from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism' (United States House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations 2001).

identifying the driving factors and highlighting which categories dominate. The sanctions are grouped by programmes, using the official programmes tags indicated on the US, OFAC and EU Sanctions Map websites; these same tags are also available in Sanctions Finder. Since some programme names are lengthy, shortened programmes tags are used in the tables, with the number of listed individuals and companies provided in brackets.

Crime-based sanctions

In Moiseienko's compelling work on crime-based sanctions, he investigates the nature of sanctions that address criminal conduct, which are used when traditional means of criminal process are not available (Moiseienko 2024). In his assessment, these measures are utilised as a complementary instrument of the criminal justice toolbox, allowing states to be more flexible and apply a lower standard of proof, which is guaranteed in the criminal process when the target is outside jurisdiction (Moiseienko 2024). My categorisation of sanctions rationale, with the first being the crime-based category, is driven by Moiseienko's work; the raison d'être of these sanctions differs from that of other types of sanctions justifications.

Moiseienko highlighted a set of particular principles governing the application of crime-based sanctions. He referred to four principles the sanctions-imposing state shall consider: 'dependence of the targeted person', 'impunity of the perpetrator', 'seriousness of the wrongdoing' and 'seniority of the perpetrator'. In so doing, the imposing state delivers sanctions under this precondition. I fully support the conceptual frameworks outlined in Moiseienko's work; however, my specification and understanding of this sanctions rationale is based on programmes rather than individual cases, as emphasised in Moiseienko's research. To investigate this justification-based sanctions framework, I select several programmes, which, when applying the described methodology, can be regarded as crime-based sanctions. For instance, the EU sanctions against cyber-attacks threatening the Union or its member states, introduced in 2019, were justified on the basis of a crime-based motif.

The sanctions addressed involve malware and ransomware attacks on the EU's web infrastructure (Poireault 2025), frequently originating from Russia, North Korea and China (Search | Sanctions Finder | Russia, North Korea, China 2024). If such attacks had occurred within the EU, the perpetrator would have been prosecuted; a number of criminal proceedings have been opened in respect of such hacker activities (Europol 2022). The official communication clearly underscores the illicit, criminal nature of these activities and implies that the sanctions were imposed because malware operations constitute a 'criminal offence', and such crimes require effective investigation by law (the EU Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox). The legal text of the cyber sanctions regulation states that

this sanctions regime addresses threats such as unauthorised access to sensitive data, theft of online data of EU officials and similar activities. The scope of sanctions includes the listing of 21 targets, which is indeed an extremely narrow category of hackers being exposed by sanctions (Bernatskyi 2024).

While the United States is actively engaged in applying crime-based justifications for sanctions, this approach is more pronounced in comparison to the EU. The United States frequently uses sanctions to target criminal networks involved in narcotics distribution and terrorist activities. For example, the United States has a specific sanctions programme aimed at combating drug trafficking, known as the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Sanctions Regulations. In its official communication, the United States emphasises that the individuals and companies targeted under this regime are involved in drug trafficking organisations such as Los Gueros in Mexico (Andres Martin ELIZONDO CASTANEDA | Sanctions Finder 2025), or are drug traffickers operating on a global scale (ADT PETROSERVICIOS, S.A. DE C.V. | Sanctions Finder 2025). The legal framework of this programme stipulates that it applies to international narcotics trafficking organisations and individuals involved in such activities (US Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control 2021). The scope of the sanctions is broad, targeting more than 1,400 individuals and entities identified as being involved in the illicit narcotics trade.

As I have shown, a crime-based justification is used when a sender state seeks to address a specific type of criminal conduct as a primary concern. This conduct serves as a triggering element for the imposition of sanctions. Typically, the criminal activity in question must have international relevance and meet a high threshold of severity and seriousness. Certain categories of criminal conduct have emerged from state practice, including terrorism, transnational organised crime and its financial support, cybercrimes and ransomware attacks, money laundering, drug trafficking and human trafficking (Portela 2021: 445). Numerous international platforms, such as Europol, facilitate coordination among states to combat these challenges, and crime-based sanctions can be viewed as a continuation of such policy efforts.

The crime-based rationale includes four sanctions programmes implemented by the EU and eight broad sanctions programmes enacted by the United States (see Table 1). Despite the fact that the EU does not have a separate programme targeting drug cartels, the United States demonstrates a greater willingness to address international terrorism through sanctions, as evidenced by the table below.

Terrorist organisations designated under the SDGT programme reflect American efforts to combat international terrorism, with geographic coverage including Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. In turn, six individuals under the EU's HAM programme were designated for a 'terrorist attack', serving as the EU's benchmark in addressing global terrorism.

Table 1: Crime-based justification of sanctions

01.04.24	Crime-based sanctions								No
EU	TAQA (351)	TERR (37)	CYB (12)	HAM (6)					406
US	SDGT (2142)	SDNTK (1519)	SDNT (399)	EO14059 (294)	CYBER2 (240)	TCO (156)	NS-PLC (78)	FTO (70)	4898

Source: EU sanctions map, EU sanctions tracker and OFAC official page.

The EU crime-based framework is more oriented towards the international anti-terrorism agenda and aligns with the efforts of the UN Security Council. In contrast, the United States consistently utilises crime-based sanctions to pursue its own objectives and priorities. For example, under the SDNTK regime, the most frequently targeted group consists of Mexican nationals who, according to OFAC, are involved in the distribution and sale of narcotics, as seen in the case of the Cali Cartel (The Treasury 2021 Sanctions Review 2021: 1). The efforts of crime-based sanctions are also directed at terrorist groups involved in the 9/11 attacks and at blocking the flow of funds to Hizballah (The Treasury 2021 Sanctions Review 2021: 1).

America's more engaged approach to crime-based sanctions can be explained, in part, by the coordinated nature of EU sanctions, which results in a different understanding of the types of crimes that can be targeted under this justification. EU sanctions are subject to a higher legal threshold at the Court of Justice of the European Union than in US courts, explaining the EU's more cautious application of the crime-based framework (Moiseienko 2024a). Therefore, demonstrating that a certain trigger for sanctions is more convincing tends to be easier within the value-based justification paradigm than within the crime-based framework. It must thus be noted that an essential feature of crime-based sanctions is that they serve as a complementary, rather than primary, tool for criminal justice.

Crime-based sanctions, both in the United States and the EU, are delivered under horizontal sanctions regimes (e.g. 'CYB' for cybercrime sanctions or 'TCO' for sanctions against transnational criminal networks), which reflect the transregional nature of criminal activities and the difficulty of holding perpetrators accountable through ordinary mechanisms of international cooperation in criminal matters. As Moiseienko concluded, 'the application of sanctions is permissible . . . against alleged perpetrators who enjoy impunity in their home countries or other countries that would ordinarily have jurisdiction over the alleged offence' (Moiseienko 2024b).

Value-based sanctions

In a sense, foreign policy is a programme of actions aimed at pursuing the values of a particular state. A value-based justification of sanctions is one among several instruments in the foreign policy arsenal used to uphold and promote those values abroad. Notoriously, such justification for sanctions has been developed to advance a specific set of values, including peaceful conflict resolution, democratisation, the promotion of human rights, the maintenance of the rule of law and support for transitional efforts, though this list is not exhaustive (European Union 2021). In summary, the desire of a sender state or group of states to uphold values abroad, whether reactively or preventively, serves as the triggering hook for sanctions.

Initially, the value-based justification was common to the UNSC sanctions regimes. In Haiti, the UNSC pursued the goal of re-establishing democratic governance in Port-au-Prince and holding free and fair elections. Subsequently, the UNSC's approach to value-based sanctions shifted focus, primarily targeting local or regional conflicts involving junta leaders or insurgent groups (UNSC Resolution 1267 1999), or addressing international terrorism under a crime-based framework (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1989 2011).

Currently, there are numerous international situations in which sender states may consider utilising a value-based rationale for sanctions, as in the case of the designation of Aleksandar Vulin for 'undermining effective and democratic governance in the Western Balkans' by the United States (Treasury Sanctions Official Linked to Corruption in Serbia 2023). In the EU, for instance, the sanctions in view of the situation in Myanmar were imposed because of 'the systematic human rights abuses perpetrated by Myanmar's military and security forces' (Council Decision 2013/184/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Myanmar/Burma 2023). In other instances, the EU targeted Syrian officials because of their 'violent repression against the civilian population' (EU Sanctions Map: Syria n.d.). A value-based justification for sanctions is also used to address events such as the intimidation of political opposition in Zimbabwe, or rigged elections in Guatemala (see Table 2).

In all these mentioned cases, both official communications and legal texts clearly indicate that the focus of the sanctions is on the protection of values. For example, in view of the situation in Myanmar, EU sanctions target individuals who are 'responsible for serious human rights violations . . . and/or undermine democracy or the rule of law' (EU Sanctions Map: Syria n.d.). The same approach was taken by the United States in backing its decision on sanctions against the Myanmar junta, citing 'atrocities against the people of Burma, including the violent repression of political dissent and violence against innocent people, including at pro-democracy protests' (Treasury Sanctions Military Leaders, Military-Affiliated Cronies and Businesses, and a Military Unit prior to Armed Forces Day in Burma 2022).

Table 2: Value-based justification of sanctions

01.04.24	VALUE-BASED SANCTIONS								No
EU	IRN (495)	SYR (418)	PRK (246)	AFG (138)	HR (128)	MMR (124)	IRQ (80)	COD (71) and 17+	1995
EU sectoral	IRN (8)	SYR (14)	PRK (27)	AFG (1)		MMR (5)	IRQ (2)	COD (1)	82
US	IFSR (868); IRAN (414); IRAN-HR (200); IRAN-TRA (31); IFCA (26)	BALKANS (169); EO14033 (45)	BURMA (143)	VENEZUELA (124); EO13850 (117)	DPRK3 (121); DPRK2 (111); DPRK4 (109); DPRK (28)	ZIMBABWE (116)	DRCONGO (74)	NICARAGUA (59) and 4+	2902
US sectoral	IFCA (6); IRAN (1)		BURMA (2)	EO13850 (4)	DPRK3 (3); DPRK4 (3); DPRK (2); DPRK2 (1)				23

Source: EU sanctions map, EU sanctions tracker and OFAC official page.

The scope of value-based sanctions justifications varies enormously, sometimes even including sectoral limitations. However, these limitations usually concern measures such as arms embargoes or prohibitions on exporting goods used for internal repression. In some cases, goods that generate significant revenue for designated officials may also be subject to sanctions.

A distinction compared to the crime-based justification is that the latter is grounded in a perception of threat, measures are adopted because the sender identifies a specific danger and responds by limiting funding for drug cartels or by exposing and deterring hackers through sanctions. In contrast, under the value-based rationale, the element of threat is often absent or less pronounced. For example, officials elected through fraudulent elections may not pose a direct threat to the EU or the US. Another clear distinction is that sectoral sanctions are more commonly applied in cases of value-based justifications than in a crime-based rationale, as is evident from the table outlined below.

Hostile sanctions

To begin with, sanctions can hardly be described as friendly measures in the context of foreign relations. However, the justification behind hostile sanctions has been profoundly overlooked, particularly in research examining the effectiveness of sanctions. The hostile sanctions rationale can be understood as a continuation of 'economic warfare – the use of foreign policy weapons . . . that are not related to specific acts of wrongdoing' (Doxey 1987: 64).

Furthermore, as a means of economic warfare, or what is increasingly referred to as economic statecraft (Drezner 2000), these restrictive measures create maximum pressure, ultimately leaving the target state with little choice but to resist (Biersteker and Parsons 2013: 12). It may also be the case that hostile sanctions are imposed in retaliation for sanctions previously imposed on the target state.

The hostile justification of sanctions is employed to punish or express disapproval of a third state's actions (or those of non-state actors), and not necessarily in response to international wrongful conduct. Certain historical prototypes of a hostile justification of sanctions can be seen in the Soviet Union's economic embargo against Yugoslavia, which was implemented exclusively in response to Tito's behaviour (Doxey 1987: 53–54). On the other hand, the US sanctions against Cuba cannot be accommodated within any rationale other than that of hostile (White 2014).[9] In more recent times, a combination of hostile

9 The author noted that 'The embargo ceased to be about punishing Cuba for its nationalisation of US-owned property, indeed it ceased to be justifiable in terms of protecting the security of the United States, since without Soviet support Cuba was no longer a threat to the US. Instead, with the end of the Cold War, the embargo became a means of coercing Cuba towards democracy; and the fight became one revolving

sanctions can be seen in the measures imposed by the Trump administration against Iran, which effectively stalled progress of the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA (Serre 2020). An example of a hostile justification is evident in the imposition of Russian restrictive measures, including a travel ban, against top US officials (see Table 3).[10]

Table 3: Hostile justification of sanctions

01.04.24	HOSTILE SANCTIONS							No
EU	TUR (2)							2
US	CUBA (74)	EO13959 (69)	EO13936 (42)	EO13846 (194)	EO13848 (97)	EO13876 (111)	EO13871 (45)	632

Source: EU sanctions map, EU sanctions tracker and OFAC official page

Categorising and identifying sanctions with hostile motives is challenging, as the imposing state may claim that the sanctions are intended to protect certain values rather than to serve merely as a gesture of disapproval. All sanctions per se are officially shielded from being considered hostile by rhetoric that justifies their use primarily as a means of protecting certain values. To challenge that argument, I suggest also examining the reality of sanctions' aims. All sanctions, apart from being hostile, as a rule, have at least a theoretical chance that their imposition will lead to a realistically achievable result. By contrast, it is problematic to assume that Russian sanctions against US and EU officials could alone lead the G7 to revoke its sanctions against Moscow.

As observed, the EU, as a collective body, generally seeks to avoid the arbitrary character of hostile sanctions. In this context, only symbolic sanctions against Turkey might serve as an example. The official reason for sanctioning two Turkish citizens was their involvement in drilling activities in the eastern

around differing understandings of self-determination and human rights. The US had one view of these fundamental aspects of international law and Cuba another.' NB: While the book's narrative suggests a longstanding hostile intent behind sanctions with unclear goals, the author heavily implies that US sanctions against Cuba are countermeasures. However, in my paper's approach, this correlation is not relevant today. Current US sanctions on Cuba do not specifically invoke countermeasures (in the official statements or reasons), and the stated goal of democratising Cuba appears to be a formal pretext to maintain these sanctions. In the absence of the aforementioned factors, the only reason these sanctions are still in effect is as a sign of disapproval towards the Cuban government.

10 It is notable to observe how academic literature frequently examines US and EU sanctions against Russia through the lens of international law, particularly in terms of their adherence to the principles of proportionality and legitimacy (for example). Surprisingly, there is a lack of examination of Russian sanctions programmes, which extend well beyond travel bans and frozen assets to include measures as severe as the confiscation of Western companies' assets.

Mediterranean. However, the measure is largely symbolic, especially given that the drilling company itself was not designated. As a result, these sanctions appear to have been designed more as a political response to negative developments in EU-Turkey relations than as part of a broader, value-driven strategy (Turkey's illegal drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: Council adopts a framework for sanctions 2019). This demonstrates that hostile sanctions can be disproportionate in both the scale and scope of measures relative to their declared end goals.

The United States has been more open to imposing hostile sanctions, with particular attention warranted for the programmes introduced under the Trump administration against Iran. All US sanctions imposed on Iran following Trump's first election shifted from a value-based framework to the category of hostile sanctions. The Trump administration aimed to dismantle much of the legacy left by President Obama; withdrawing from the JCPOA was one of several key issues on the domestic post-election agenda (Serre 2020). Leaving no room for compromise, Washington's ultimatum to Tehran launched a new phase of escalation. These sanctions can only be understood as the United States deliberately undermining the deal with a single aim: to express disapproval of Iranian policy, while reserving no space for further manoeuvring or dialogue.

What is more striking is that the consequences of hostile sanctions can be far more unpredictable and far-reaching. For example, Trump's sanctions against Iran left the EU unable to achieve any visible results or progress on its own in implementing the JCPOA. This situation frustrated proponents of diplomatic dialogue and emboldened aggressive ultraconservatives, reinforcing the message that no deal is ever possible. Such outcomes are difficult to imagine in the context of other sanctions rationales, highlighting the extreme challenge of applying any standard system of effectiveness to cases involving hostile sanctions.

The Cuban sanctions programme is another clear example of a hostile sanctions rationale, which cannot be meaningfully attached to any other sanctions framework, as these measures are 'not related to specific acts of wrongdoing' (Doxey 1987: 64). Likely the longest-standing sanctions regime maintained by the United States, it continues without a clearly articulated justification for its persistence. Initially imposed because of ties between Havana and Soviet Moscow, the longer these sanctions have remained in place, the less evidence has emerged to support their effectiveness in achieving regime change or altering behaviour. In the end, the only consistent element appears to be the expression of political hostility towards Havana. To conclude, in the case of hostile sanctions, the process of sanctions delivery often carries more weight than the actual end result.

Last but not least, the recent US sanctions against the ICC Prosecutor provide clear evidence of a hostile justification for sanctions. There was no official communication accompanying the designation, and the legal text was drafted

solely to target officials of the ICC. As of May 2025, the scope of the sanctions includes only one individual.

Countermeasures

The correlation between sanctions and countermeasures may be uncertain and often blurred, but certain sanctions are nonetheless invoked under the pretext of responding to violations of specific treaty norms, and are thus presented as lawful countermeasures under the Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (ARSIWA), while others clearly are not.

The trigger for imposing countermeasures is the will of the injured state to respond to a violation of its rights under a specific treaty, accompanied by a clear statement that the sender state is invoking countermeasures. While the existence of a violation is a necessary condition, a state may choose not to invoke countermeasures, opting instead for diplomatic negotiations or judicial mechanisms to resolve the dispute. This is why the willingness to respond to a specific norm violation is a key element that triggers their application.

This type of sanctions rationale is utilised in cases of international concern that are governed by specific treaty mechanisms, as seen in situations involving the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, efforts to combat the use and spread of chemical weapons, and violations of treaty norms. For instance, 'Iran's nuclear programme has been a matter of international concern ever since the discovery in 2003 that it had concealed its nuclear activities for 18 years in breach of its obligations' (US Intelligence on Iran's Nuclear Programme Should Spur Talks, Says UN Official | UN News 2007). According to further UN reports, 'Iran has not suspended all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities or taken a number of other steps required by the Council to build confidence' (Security Council Imposes Sanctions on Iran over Uranium Enrichment | UN News 2006).

In the situation related to Iran and the Tehran Hostages, the United States imposed sanctions under a countermeasures-objective rationale, clearly appealing to Iran's violation of diplomatic law norms. The measures introduced included the freezing of Iranian state assets, a ban on the energy-related sector, entry bans and other restrictions. These sanctions were lifted only after the signing of the agreement to resolve the crisis in 1981 (Doxey 1987: 6, 73).

One of the recent and notable cases where sanctions were deployed within the countermeasures objective rationale was the US response to 'the Russian Federation's ongoing violations of the New START [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] Treaty' (US Countermeasures in Response to Russia's Violations of the New START Treaty - United States Department of State 2023). The United States listed four countermeasures in response: withholding participation in the treaty's notification procedures, refraining from conducting Treaty inspections, revoking visas previously issued to Russian inspectors and ceasing the provision of telemetric information.

Although many practitioners study sanctions with the assumption that all sanctions are equivalent to countermeasures (Zhou 2023), suggesting that all ARSIWA limitations should apply correspondingly to all sanctions (Tzanakopoulos 2020), I argue that this approach can be misleading. For instance, a crime-based justification against drug cartels should not be evaluated under the ARSIWA framework for countermeasures, as this framework is simply unsuitable and redundant for such purposes.

While countermeasures might be taken into account when the states are referring to them, as in the US press release on START countermeasures, other countermeasures might be mapped through the actions taken in response to concerns that are subject to control by international organisations or that are of evident international concern. In 2018, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) found that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Apart from the investigation, the United States and other countries imposed sanctions for the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian army. According to official reasons, the Syrian companies were designated because of their involvement in procuring goods for the Syrian agency responsible for the development of Syria's chemical weapons (The United States and France Take Coordinated Action on Global Procurement Network for Syria's Chemical Weapons Program 2024). These companies were placed under the Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferators and Their Supporters programme. An identical sanctions programme was introduced by the EU against the proliferation and use of chemical weapons. As mentioned in the official reasoning for the programme's introduction, 'these measures are in line with UN Security Council Resolutions 1540 (2004), 2118 (2013), 2209 (2015), 2235 (2015), and 2325 (2016)' (The United States and France Take Coordinated Action on Global Procurement Network for Syria's Chemical Weapons Program 2024). In doing so, the EU and the United States linked these sanctions programmes to UNSC resolutions, and thus I consider that they fall under a countermeasures justification (see Table 4).

Table 4: Countermeasures justification of sanctions

01.04.24	COUNTERMEASURES							No
EU	CHEM (28)							28
US	NPWMD (731)							731

Source: EU sanctions map, EU sanctions tracker and OFAC official page

Still, some countermeasures might be evaluated in numerical terms, while others may not. Specific programmes aimed at combatting the dissemination of weapons of mass destruction or chemical weapons may be assessed through a single prism. US START countermeasures, on the other hand, were implemented through a more conservative path by denying the contracting party certain rights and privileges under the Convention. Given the declining role of international treaty mechanisms and the lack of coordination at the UNSC regarding sanctions, the future of countermeasures remains uncertain. States may increasingly seek to free themselves from the principles governed by ARSIWA, gaining wider room for manoeuvre in a dynamically changing international environment.

War-based sanctions

Sanctions in response to aggression, referred to here as a war-based justification, are unique, as these measures involve international coordination mechanisms. They are broad in scope as a rule, and both official political communication and legal reasoning typically appeal to the context of war or aggression. The trigger for imposing war sanctions can be an 'armed attack' (Article 51 of the UN Charter) or an 'act of aggression', GA Resolution 3314 (XXIX) (Moret 2022: 8).

Historically, the League of Nations' sanctions against Italy, which invaded Ethiopia on 3 October 1935, represent the first instance of a war-based justification for sanctions (Doxey 1987: 17). These sanctions included a broad spectrum of sectoral measures, although their implementation was far from uniform across the members of the League of Nations. The imposition of these sanctions was directly linked to Italy's aggression against Ethiopia, which is why they fall under the war sanctions paradigm.

Another episode of war sanctions can be seen in the conflict over the Falkland Islands. In 1982, Argentina launched a military operation to seize the Falklands. In response, Britain and the European Economic Community adopted a series of sectoral sanctions and an arms embargo, backed by UN Security Council Resolution 502 (Daoudi and Dajani 1983: 150). In both cases, the trigger for sanctions was the use of force, so the restrictive measures imposed during the Falklands conflict can be characterised within the war sanctions framework.

In 1990, the UNSC imposed a set of war-based sanctions against Iraq, including an arms embargo and trade restrictions, in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. There was a prohibition on dealing with assets owned by Saddam Hussein's regime, or by persons or entities that were part of or associated with that regime and had been designated by the UNSC (UNSC Resolution 661 (1990) 1990).

Imposing a war-based rationale is a highly sensitive issue because of the extensive range of restrictive measures involved. Its implementation is often subject to a high threshold of political scrutiny. Nowadays, without international consensus, at least among G7 actors, the enactment of such a comprehensive set of

actions becomes highly questionable. The most recent and clear example of a war sanctions justification includes the measures adopted against Russia since 2014, which have intensified since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The EU's rationale behind these sanctions was to address 'the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by armed forces of the Russian Federation and the involvement of Belarus in this aggression against Ukraine' (EU Sanctions Map: Ukraine (Crimea) n.d.). The specific aim was 'weakening Russia's economic base, depriving it of critical technologies and markets, and significantly curtailing its ability to wage war' (EU Sanctions Map: Russia, n.d.). In turn, UK sanctions against Russia also explicitly follow the logic of the war sanctions rationale (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office 2024: 8).

In the case of sanctions against Russia, we must also take into account how costly and politically sensitive the imposition process is. Their implementation requires international coordination within G7 fora (FACT SHEET: Supporting Ukraine and Imposing Accountability for Russia's Invasion 2024) and, at a minimum, non-circumvention policies in third countries. For instance, specific international agencies such as the Russian Elites, Proxies, and Oligarchs (REPO) multilateral task force (US Departments of Justice and Treasury Launch Multilateral Russian Oligarch Task Force 2022), Task Force KleptoCapture (Attorney General Merrick B. Garland Announces Launch of Task Force KleptoCapture 2022) and the Disruptive Technology Strike Force (Justice and Commerce Departments Announce Creation of Disruptive Technology Strike Force 2023) were established to facilitate coordination between sanctions enforcement bodies and to track Russian assets.

Even a surface-level analysis reveals how different war sanctions are from crime-based or hostile frameworks. Moreover, comparing their effectiveness or impact should be approached separately (Giumelli 2024: 211-228); it is impractical to apply the same methodological framework to assess the success or impact of sanctions against one of the largest states, to sanctions against a narcotics cartel in Mexico. This distortion is often overlooked in numerous academic studies, expert opinions and even government policies.

The war-based rationale, indeed, represents a significant shift in the number and scope of sanctions enforced. There is nothing comparable, as no other international sanctions have been imposed with the same volume, pace and breadth (Nicolazzo et al. 2025: 22). Notably, the normal yearly sanctions dynamic typically involves about 200 personal designations per year in the EU and around 800 listings in the United States. However, with the imposition of war sanctions, this pattern has dramatically changed: The number of personal listings increased six to eight times in the EU and three times in the US in 2022, with a similar trend continuing in 2023. This surge in sanctions activity underscores the unique and unprecedented nature of the war sanctions rationale (see Table 5).

Table 5: War-based justification of sanctions

	War sanctions OR								No
EU	UKR (2157)	RUS (648)	BLR (302)						3107
EU sectoral	UKR (4)	RUS (23)	BLR (17)						44
US	EO14024 (3864)	EO13662 (309)	EO13661 (189)	EO13660 (154)	EO14038 (142)	EO13685 (96)	BELARUS (73)	CAATSA (54)	4869
US sectoral	EO14038 (9)	EO14024 (6)	EO13662 (3)	EO13685 (3)					21

Source: EU sanctions map, EU sanctions tracker and OFAC official page

Table 6: Sanctions justification v. effectiveness, legitimacy and proportionality[11]

	Crime-based	Value-based	Hostile	Countermeasures	War-based
Effectiveness	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	High
Legitimacy	Medium	High	Low	High	Medium
Proportionality	Low	Medium	Low	High	Low

Source: Author

11 In this table, I propose to assess which aspect of effectiveness, legitimacy and proportionality is relevant for evaluation within each group of sanctions justifications. I suggest a three-grade system: Low – not relevant at all or of little relevance for a particular sanctions rationale group; Medium – relevant but not a central aspect; High – extremely relevant and should be considered a primary criterion. This framework is designed to distinguish what matters when evaluating sanctions, and which justification groups have little or no value in measuring certain aspects of effectiveness, legitimacy and proportionality.

Figure 1: Sanctions Tracker: The chart displays the personal sanctions imposed by the United States, the UK, and the EU against Russia from January 2023 to January 2024, broken down by month for both companies and individuals.

Source: Sanctions Finder tracker

A key distinctive feature of sanctions in response to aggression is the rapid nature of their imposition, occurring immediately after the act of aggression. Unlike other sanctions regimes, which tend to follow more predictable imposition dynamics, sanctions in response to aggression can escalate quickly, potentially doubling in severity, as noted above (see Figure 1). The explosive nature of war-based rationales presents significant challenges for enforcement agencies, businesses, logistics operators and other relevant actors (Roundtable: Sanctions Compliance and Enforcement 2024).

Sanctions justification and underlying concepts

In this section, I further explain why the justifications outlined above are relevant and add value to existing studies examining sanctions. As highlighted in the introduction, major topics such as effectiveness, legitimacy and proportionality are among the most widely investigated in sanctions research (Cameron & Moiseienko 2021). However, in the majority of these studies, if not all, sanctions are explored in a uniform manner, without distinguishing between different programmes, regimes and the underlying justifications (see Table 6).

Implicitly, comparisons are often drawn between fundamentally different cases, such as the effectiveness of sanctions against drug cartels and those imposed on

Russia, treating them as part of the same paradigm. Similarly, the legitimacy of sanctions in response to the situation in Myanmar is often discussed as if it were equivalent to American sanctions programmes against the ICC. These studies overlook the critical aspect of justification and fail to clarify that certain groups of sanctions cannot be meaningfully compared with others. Thus, it is first necessary to clarify what justification was used to impose sanctions, and only then to assess their effectiveness or legitimacy, or proportionality.

So, when sanctions are analysed in terms of effectiveness, legitimacy and proportionality, we need to consider the appropriate sanctions regimes and the relevance of their justifications. As explained below, assessing the effectiveness of hostile sanctions or countermeasures appears to be a redundant task. What measurement can be meaningfully applied to evaluate the effectiveness of American sanctions against the ICC Prosecutor or the EU's designation of two Turkish nationals? In such cases, it is simply not relevant to assess these sanctions based on whether they are effective or not.

Taking the US countermeasures against Russia on START as an example: Does it make sense to assess their effectiveness? How can the procedure of suspension notifications be meaningfully evaluated through the lens of whether this step is effective or not? Again, under this sanctions justification, evaluating efficacy is simply unnecessary, as there are no objective criteria for doing so. The framework itself excludes the expectation that the sender requires such measures to be effective in a conventional sense.

The same applies to crime-based sanctions when studies address the question of proportionality. Since many crime-based justifications concern terrorist activities or drug distribution by cartels, what kind of proportionality assessment can meaningfully be applied? Is it relevant to conduct a proportionality check when imposing sanctions on ISIS or the Cali Cartel? Even if so, what type of proportionality would be appropriate? This illustrates that within the framework of crime-based justifications, proportionality is largely irrelevant as a criterion, it's simply not a consideration for sender states when such sanctions are imposed.

Considering the war-based rationale, I argue that effectiveness has strong relevance, as there is a clear and evident aim to halt aggression. However, proportionality, in my view, has weak relevance as a subject of study in this context. Hofer, for instance, argues that the sanctions imposed by the EU and its allies against Russia did not meet the criteria of proportionality. She questioned whether the 'state's decision-making' (Hofer 2023) on each designated person or company was properly assessed. Her analysis, however, is based solely on a single sanctions regime targeting Russia – one that, in my work, is situated within the war-based rationale.

In the context of war-based sanctions, proportionality carries little weight and holds limited significance for sender states. Why is this the case? First, sanctions

justified on this particular basis address the most pressing and flagrant violations of international law. Second, the scale of destruction in Ukraine and the human losses resulting from the aggression are unprecedented since World War II. Atrocities committed against the Ukrainian civilian population have been widely reported and documented, with the ICC opening formal cases. Given this, what specific test of proportionality should be applied? There is no objective standard for applying a proportionality criterion to sanctions aimed at weakening Moscow's ability to wage aggressive war. Should 3,300 designations by the EU be considered proportionate, or would 7,000, as done by the United States, be the appropriate benchmark? (Bernatskyi 2024).[12] Would a ban on LNG exports be proportionate, or would a prohibition on timber imports be more suitable? My argument is that proportionality can be meaningfully applied in situations involving human rights violations, where the focus is on targeting enablers or perpetrators of gross abuses. In the case of countermeasures, as governed by ARSIWA, proportionality must be maintained in response to the specific violation. However, it is problematic to objectively assess proportionality in the case of war-based sanctions.

Effectiveness for crime-based sanctions can be evaluated by assessing whether the measures successfully disrupt criminal activities (Moiseienko 2024b). If such disruption occurs, such as blocking financial flows, dismantling operational networks or hindering access to resources, then those sanctions can be considered effective within the scope of their intended purpose. Yet, it cannot be stated that effectiveness has the highest relevance within the crime-based framework. Despite numerous sanctions programmes, issues related to drugs and narcotics remain a major challenge for the United States, and while sanctions may offer some relief, their impact is far from decisive.

What does effectiveness mean for value-based sanctions? While we defined effectiveness for crime-based sanctions as the disruption of criminal activities, for value-based sanctions the indicators of effectiveness might include progress in human rights, the holding of free and fair elections, the release of political prisoners or a reduction in human rights violations, depending on the specific regime in question.

However, the majority of economic studies on sanctions effectiveness tend to focus on macroeconomic indicators such as GDP, investment levels, employment rates or trade inflows. These indicators are largely irrelevant when evaluating the effectiveness of either crime-based or value-based sanctions, as such sanctions are not designed to inflict economic harm. This contrasts with war-based justifications,

12 'According to Russian government data, the military-industrial complex comprises 1,355 enterprises employing two million people. Notably, around 70 top-level managers from the Russian defence companies remain unsanctioned by the EU' (Texty.org.ua 2022).

where economic pressure and damage, and economic pain, are often viewed as central indicators of a sanctions programme's success (Giumelli 2024).

Legitimacy is a broad and widely investigated dimension of sanctions, encompassing concerns such as whether these measures infringe upon human rights (Happold 2016)[13] or how sanctions, particularly when considered unilateral, can be deemed legitimate. Here, I include a wide range of legal considerations that sanctions must adhere to and be evaluated against. Legitimacy is particularly relevant to value-based justifications of sanctions programmes, as such measures are intended primarily to uphold the international legal order. There is a presumed expectation that these sanctions, at a minimum, should not violate the fundamental principles of that order. The same relevance applies to countermeasures, which must comply with the strict provisions and procedures outlined in ARSIWA; failure to do so undermines their legal grounding and legitimacy. By contrast, legitimacy is not a central concern for hostile sanctions, as the sending state's intent is typically to signal a political position or express displeasure, rather than to conform to any legal standards.

Legitimacy concerns are definitely not central to crime-based sanctions, yet they are not completely overlooked. Arguments for legitimacy in the crime-based context must stem from criminal investigations rather than from the official communication of sanctions imposition. However, this remains an under-researched aspect, as legitimacy in relation to crime-based sanctions has rarely been examined, especially compared to human rights sanctions regimes or Russia-related sanctions. Moreover, the arguments typically used to discuss legitimacy (e.g. through the application of ARSIWA norms) in other frameworks seem ill-suited when applied to sanctions targeting cartels, kidnappers, drug dealers and similar criminal actors.

Conclusion

In 2024, the UK foreign secretary published a guiding paper outlining how London understands its sanctions strategy. David Cameron emphasised that the government's assessment of sanctions effectiveness is measured against 'a regime's original objectives' (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office 2024: 6). While the paper does not specify the full range of possible regime objectives, the

13 As stated with respect to the prevailing literature on sanctions, this chapter similarly approaches the human rights dimension in a uniform manner across all types of sanctions, with a particular focus on how these measures are challenged in courts. In my view, this approach is insufficient for fully understanding the nature of sanctions. For example, challenging war-based sanctions appears far less relevant than a challenge brought by a human rights perpetrator seeking to contest the justification for their listing. In cases involving the hostile rationale for sanctions, the relevance of contesting their legitimate grounds is minimal, as these measures often serve domestic political purposes, such as the sanctioning of the ICC Prosecutor.

categorisation of sanctions rationale proposed in this study serves as a necessary precondition for achieving the clarity and proper management of expectations in sanctions policy to which the UK foreign secretary referred.

The need to modernise the policy framework governing sanctions imposition has been expressed by the Treasury (The Treasury 2021 Sanctions Review 2021: 4). To this end, the present study contributes to this overarching goal by addressing the needs of public authorities responsible for the streamlined delivery of sanctions. It provides guidance on how to appropriately frame sanctions justification, demonstrating that the rationale for sanctions imposition is the key foundation for assessing effectiveness, considering legitimacy and evaluating proportionality.

While a lot is known about what sanctions aim to achieve; however, their trigger is often overlooked. There is an unwritten raison d'être for each sanctions regime that is eventually articulated once the sanctions are imposed. To interpret the framework employed, one must examine the official reasoning for the sanctions (both in official communication and legal texts), review the international situation that triggered their imposition and assess the scale and scope of the measures adopted in response. This study enables the identification and differentiation of five distinct sanctions justifications, each governed by its own principles and internal logic: crime-based, value-based, hostile, countermeasures and war-based sanctions rationale.

Having considered that, sanctions research should preferably clarify which specific group of sanctions and corresponding justification is being used as the basis for the study. As Moiseienko observed, 'determining the effectiveness of sanctions requires an objective by which effectiveness is measured' (Moiseienko 2024b). My work identifies five distinct rationales against which effectiveness, legitimacy and proportionality can be evaluated and reconsidered, thus filling the niche underscored by Moiseienko.

Table 7: All sanctions justifications: comparative analysis

	Crime-based	Value-based	Hostile	Counter…	War sanctions	All
EU	406 (7%)	1995 (36%)	2 (0%)	28 (0.5%)	3107 (56%)	5520
US	4898 (30%)	2902 (18%)	632 (4%)	731 (4%)	4869 (30%)	15962

Source: EU sanctions map, EU sanctions tracker and OFAC official page

Table 7 summarises which rationale is most commonly utilised and in which instances it is applicable. Numerically, the United States has implemented more value-based sanctions than the EU, but in terms of percentage, it only ranks third in the overall US sanctions agenda. Hostile justification holds little relevance for the EU, as it strives to maintain a sanctions record aligned with the values paradigm

(Beaucillon 2021a: 3). In contrast, the United States has demonstrated a greater willingness to employ a hostile rationale, as seen in the Trump administration's sanctions against Iran.

With the rise of international conflicts, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the war in Gaza, the conflict between Iran and Israel, debates over intervention in Taiwan and military instability in other parts of the world, the role of war-based sanctions justifications is set to become increasingly dominant. Those responsible for managing these programmes must have a clear understanding of the principles to which they are committed. Authorities must adequately frame the justification for sanctions, and studies investigating the effectiveness, legitimacy and proportionality of sanctions should take this justification into account. Applying this approach in practice will lead to more precise results and clearer findings regarding what can truly be considered effective, and what cannot.

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Research article

High, Dry and Allied: The Ethics of Breaching the Collective Defence Duty

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Abstract

This article adopts a normative approach to one of the most consequential issues of alliance management: the question of if and when an ally is justified in breaching its collective defence duty (CDD). An ally's CDD constitutes its formal obligation to militarily defend its ally in the event that the latter experiences an armed attack. Drawing on both normative political theory and contemporary International Relations scholarship on alliance credibility and security dilemmas, the article first considers and rejects two opposing but equally extreme views on this question. Next, the article proposes what it calls the Moderate View as a more persuasive response. The Moderate View draws on Glenn Snyder's concept of the alliance security dilemma to argue that Ally X is justified in breaching its CDD if it is reasonable for Ally X to believe that there is a high likelihood of its imminent entrapment by Ally Y, and if Ally X cannot reduce this likelihood by signalling its concerns to Ally Y. Two distinct arguments are then provided in support of the Moderate View. In the final section, the Moderate View is defended against three objections. The article demonstrates how empirical concepts from IR can inform normative theorising while providing practical ethical guidance for alliance policymakers.

Keywords: *alliances, ethics, collective defence, security dilemma, war*

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Introduction

More than three years into Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and following Donald Trump's return to the US presidency in early 2025, European NATO members find themselves confronting a question that has haunted allied states throughout history: Will their most powerful ally honour its commitment to defend them in their hour of need? While Article 5 of the NATO treaty legally obligates all members to assist any ally suffering an armed attack, Trump's repeated expressions of scepticism towards the alliance – including past suggestions that the United States might not defend allies failing to meet defence spending targets – have intensified European concerns about potential American abandonment (Jonah 2025). This anxiety reflects a perennial dilemma of alliance politics, which take place against the backdrop of an anarchic international system in which interstate agreements remain unenforceable, and the intentions of even close allies can never be completely known (Mearsheimer 2001; Waltz 1979). In contemporary alliance politics, it is not hard to find other cases where the risk is present in the mind of a state vis-à-vis its allies: for example, Australia, Japan and the Philippines vis-à-vis mutual ally the United States against the backdrop of a rapidly rising and ever more assertive China. If these threatened states failed to receive the military assistance that their crucial US ally has a treaty duty to provide to them, they would find themselves in an exceedingly dangerous situation.

Yet despite these cases and the continuing salience of the issue in the international security domain, and despite the large amount of *positive* – i.e. descriptive, explanatory or predictive – work on the subject in international relations (IR), IR scholars have shown no interest in exploring the *normative* implications of an ally breaching its obligation to defend its ally from attack (though some rare exceptions are Kunertova 2017 and Rubin 2023). The study of alliances has evolved considerably over recent decades. What might be termed 'first generation' alliance research focused primarily on capability aggregation models, wherein states ally in order to pool military resources against common threats (Walt 1987; Waltz 1979), and on security-autonomy trade-offs, wherein asymmetric allies exchange military protection for policy influence (Morrow 1991).

This body of research, while foundational, has increasingly ceded ground to 'second generation' research that often employs rational choice and bargaining models in order to examine alliance formation and maintenance through the theoretical lenses of strategic interaction, credible commitment problems and incentives for domestic political survival. Todd Sandler's (2006) influential work on collective action, in particular, has demonstrated that alliance dynamics extend well beyond simple capability aggregation to encompass complex problems of burden-sharing, free-riding and collective goods provision. Similarly, a robust literature on alliance credibility has examined how domestic political institutions

– particularly democratic electoral mechanisms – affect the perceived trustworthiness and reliability of security commitments (Fearon 1994; Gaubatz 1996; Schultz 1999; Weeks 2008). A key insight of this literature is that any given allied state's decision to enter a conflict in defence of its treaty ally will of necessity be endogenous to the alliance commitment itself. Put otherwise, the dynamics that drive the process of alliance formation (i.e. who commits to ally with whom) will tend to shape subsequent conflict behaviour (i.e. who takes action to defend whom) in ways that first generation theories did not fully capture.[^7] Constructivist scholarship, in turn, has at once critiqued and enriched rationalist insights and findings of this sort by highlighting how alliances can constitute security communities built upon shared identities, norms and practices rather than purely upon each state's interest-based and security-driven calculations of the net benefits of collective defence (Adler and Barnett 1998; Risse 1996; Wendt 1999). Constructivists have above all emphasised that states may honour alliance commitments due to what James March and Johan Olsen (1998) famously term a 'logic of appropriateness' – i.e. due to a preference for acting in accordance with internalised norms – rather than to what they call a 'logic of consequences'.

What unites these diverse scholarly approaches – i.e. first generation and second generation, rationalist and constructivist – is their uniform focus on positive inquiry rather than normative inquiry. Similarly, scholars working in the international political theory (IPT) subfield of political philosophy, employing a normative approach to issues in international politics, have shown little to no interest in alliances *tout court*, let alone in the ethical dimensions of an ally's abrogating its collective defence duty.

This article aims to address these overlapping gaps in the IR and IPT literatures by adopting an explicitly normative approach to alliance management, and specifically to the question of when, if ever, a state is justified in breaching its duty to defend its ally. The present article does not attempt to supplant or compete with rationalist or constructivist approaches to alliances. Rather, it addresses a gap that exists across all of them: the systematic normative analysis of alliance obligations. While rationalist approaches excel at explaining when and why states form alliances and predicting when commitments will be honoured or breached, they typically bracket questions of moral justification. When is a state morally justified in breaching its collective defence duty? What ethical principles should govern this decision? These are not questions that rational choice models are designed to answer, nor are they questions that have been addressed by the extensive literatures on alliance credibility and political survival. Similarly, while constructivists demonstrate that states often perceive themselves as bound by genuine obligations to allies, they do not typically engage in the prescriptive project of determining what those obligations should entail or when they may permissibly be violated. This is where normative political theory makes its dis-

tinctive contribution. The IPT subfield takes normative questions – questions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, permissibility and impermissibility – as its main focus. IPT scholars have extensively analysed the ethics of war (McMahan 2009; Walzer 2015), humanitarian intervention (Pattison 2012) and distributive justice (Rawls 1999), yet alliances have received virtually no sustained normative attention despite their centrality to international security politics. This article aims to fill that gap by bringing the tools of normative analysis to bear on collective defence obligations.

Such an approach is worth undertaking for several reasons. To begin with, a state's formal obligation to militarily aid its allies carries with it a host of interesting and important ethical questions, of which I will focus on one in particular. Furthermore, a normative approach to collective defence duties can both complement and enrich the enormous positive literature on alliance formation and alliance management by helping to facilitate a greater scholarly awareness of the potential moral complexities and dilemmas embedded in alliance politics. The approach taken here can be characterised as critical in at least two senses: It critically examines taken-for-granted assumptions about alliance obligations, refusing to accept either that such obligations are absolute or that they are merely epiphenomenal to power politics; and it draws on critical concepts from the IR literature – in particular, Glenn Snyder's alliance security dilemma (1984) – to inform normative theorising, thereby bridging empirical insights about alliance dynamics with ethical reasoning about obligations. Finally, the analysis of alliances from a normative perspective can furnish political actors and policymakers with critical information about the ethics of a given strategy or policy that is adopted, or a given action that is taken, by their state in relation to the defence of an ally. In short, a normative approach to alliances, and particularly to the question of if and when an ally is justified in abrogating the collective defence duty, would be a valuable addition to scholarship and policy research on the subject. Extrapolating from the foregoing discussion, the specific contributions of this article can be understood as being three in number. It provides, first of all, the first systematic normative account of, and framework for, evaluating when the breach of an alliance's collective defence duty (CDD) may be justified. In addition, the article demonstrates how empirical concepts from positive research on alliances within IR – most notably, the alliance security dilemma – can productively inform the aforementioned normative theorising, anchoring the latter in the often unpredictable and perilous complexities of real-world alliance politics and international security.

The article proceeds as follows. In the first section, I outline the methodological approach employed in this article. In the second section, I define an alliance and discuss the nature of the collective defence duty that arises from alliance membership. In the third and fourth sections, I present and then reject two extreme

views – what I call the Idealist View and the Hobbesian View – on the question of whether the collective defence duty can ever justifiably be breached by an ally. In the fifth section, I introduce what I call the Moderate View on this question and then go on to support the view with two distinct arguments. In the sixth section, I defend the Moderate View against three objections. A brief final section concludes.

Methodological approach

Before examining competing views on when CDD breach may be justified, it is necessary to clarify the methodological approach employed in this article. This clarification is especially important given that modern alliance scholarship spans multiple methodological traditions, including large-n quantitative studies, game-theoretic formal modelling and qualitative comparative case studies.[1] These methodologies, however, grounded as they are in empirical hypothesis testing and aiming as they do at positive inquiry, are clearly inappropriate for undertaking the kind of normative inquiry pursued in this article. The main aim of that inquiry is not to explain why allied states do or do not honour their CDD, nor to predict under what conditions such breaches will occur. Rather, the primary aim is to develop a normative framework for determining when allied states are morally justified in breaching the CDD. The most appropriate methodology for undertaking this aim is philosophical argumentation. This methodology involves clearly defining concepts, employing those concepts in the formulation of principles, developing arguments in support of these principles, considering counterarguments to the latter and objections to the principals themselves, refining the principles in light of these critiques, and testing the normative and practical tenability of the principles against concrete empirical cases, which may be either actual or hypothetical in nature.[2] It is this general methodological approach, which has become standard within normative political theory and applied ethics, that structures and guides this article's use of hypothetical alliance scenarios grounded in real-world alliance contexts. These hypothetical cases serve several purposes that are worth elaborating.

The use of hypothetical cases allows, first of all, for greater clarity by testing normative principles under relatively controlled conditions in which relevant

1 For large-n quantitative studies, see for example Leeds *et al*. (2002). For formal modelling, see for example Smith (1995). For qualitative case studies, see for example Pressman (2008).

2 This approach is sometimes broadly and loosely described as the method of 'reflective equilibrium', which was first formulated by John Rawls (1971) and which instructs us to begin with our considered moral judgments about particular cases, then to formulate general principles to explain these, and then finally to move back and forth between judgments and principles – revising either as needed – until we are able to attain a coherent, mutually supporting system in which our specific beliefs and abstract principles are in stable alignment.

variables can be isolated and manipulated. For example, by constructing scenarios in which the entrapment of an ally is clearly imminent and the possibility of signalling is either unavailable or has demonstrably failed, we are arguably in a better position to assess whether these conditions truly support a possible moral intuition that CDD breach is warranted. Having said this, it is worth stressing that the hypothetical scenarios employed in this article are not arbitrary or overly hygienic thought experiments whose details and dynamics are wholly disconnected from reality.[3] Rather, they are constructed with the aim in mind of reflecting real-world alliance relationships (e.g. France-Greece and China-North Korea), existing geopolitical tensions (e.g. Eastern Mediterranean disputes, Korean Peninsula security), plausible conflict dynamics that account for regional power configurations, and pertinent decision-making constraints facing allied states. In this respect, the scenarios function similarly to hypothetical cases in applied ethics that, while not describing actual events, capture the essential features of the ethical dilemmas under investigation. A second purpose served by the use of hypothetical scenarios is that these scenarios facilitate the exploration of boundary conditions and hard cases that may not have clear historical precedents. While there certainly are historically documented cases of alliance abandonment (e.g. France's failure to assist Russia in 1904–05 and, debatably, the Rio Pact's failure to assist Argentina in 1982), it remains true that detailed evidence about the reasoning and circumstances surrounding these breaches is often unavailable or contested. Hypotheticals allow us to specify precisely the conditions under which breach occurs, making the normative analysis more precise. A third purpose served, finally, is that by opting to construct and normatively examine fictive scenarios rather than cases that have actually occurred, it becomes easier to avoid triggering the political allegiances and biases of both author and reader and establish greater objectivity and transparency. Relatedly, it also becomes easier to avoid potential diplomatic sensitivities that might arise from analysing contemporary allies' actual contingency plans or suggesting that particular allies might breach their commitments. Given that the article's analysis could in theory help inform contemporary policy debates, it seems prudent to avoid being perceived as making insinuations concerning the future intentions of named states.

Having described the article's normative methodological approach, the limitations of such an approach should be acknowledged. First, and as implied in the introduction's discussion of positive versus normative inquiry, normative theory-building by definition neither can nor aspires to generate empirically testable predictions about state behaviour. The Moderate View articulates the conditions under which CDD breach is morally justified. It does not, however,

3 See the sharp critique of such hypotheticals, and the framework for evaluating hypotheticals generally, that is offered in Thaler (2018).

predict whether any one member of a given alliance will actually breach its CDD under those conditions or whether that member will be motivated by the Moderate View's normative logic when doing so. Both of these (empirical) questions, in order to be undertaken, require a (positive) methodology that is very different from the (normative) one used in this article. Second, the hypothetical cases employed in the article must necessarily simplify complex geopolitical realities. Real-world alliance decisions inevitably involve a large array of overlapping factors and considerations, including incomplete information, bureaucratic politics and domestic political pressures, none of which can be fully captured in stylised scenarios. Those scenarios, to reiterate a point discussed just above, are chiefly intended to isolate key morally relevant empirical variables for normative analysis. They are not in any way designed to (nor could they possibly) capture the full complexity of actual intra-alliance decision-making.

Alliance preliminaries

I define an alliance as *a bilateral or multilateral institution formed between states and grounded in a formal agreement mandating, under one or more specified circumstances, the deployment or nondeployment of military force by Ally X vis-à-vis Ally Y (with Ally Y representing a vector of all current allies of Ally X)*.[4] This definition includes the alliance types of offense pact, defence pact, consultation pact, neutrality pact and nonaggression pact.[5] Importantly, however, the argument developed in future sections applies mainly to defence pacts. Defence pacts commit Ally X to help militarily defend Ally Y in the event of an unprovoked armed attack against Ally Y by a specified or unspecified third state. These pacts tend to be the alliance type that, among scholars, analysts and the general population, is most closely associated with the term 'alliance', possibly due to the enduring prominence of the multilateral defence pact NATO. Hence, when I use the term 'alliance' in what follows, I mainly have in mind defence pacts. Although with appropriate modifications the argument could be made applicable to the other alliance types, in its present form it often proves inapplicable to them. This is because the content of the collective defence duty (see just below) largely assumes a defence pact, and also because Snyder's alliance security dilemma, which is so central to the argument advanced in the sixth section, is less operative in the context of these other types.

With this definition of an alliance spelled out, it is necessary to conceptualise what I have been calling the 'collective defence duty' (hereafter 'CDD'). The CDD, as the concept is used throughout this article, denotes *the formal obligation of Ally X to provide military assistance to Ally Y in the event that Ally Y is the target of an armed attack*. In Hohfeldian terms, the CDD functions essentially as a claim

4 For alternative definitions, see Leeds (2020: 6); Snyder (1997: 4); Walt (1987: 12).
5 See Leeds *et al.* (2002) for detailed descriptions of these types.

right possessed by Ally Y vis-à-vis Ally X in regard to the military defence of Ally Y in the contingency of an attack on the latter, or (equivalently) as the absence of a liberty right that would otherwise (i.e. if Ally X and Ally Y were not allied) be possessed by Ally X in regard to the same action and contingency (Wenar 2022). As such, the CDD can be said to constitute the deontic foundation of an alliance agreement and the element of that agreement that provides it with its substantive distinctiveness as a treaty under international law. The NATO treaty, for example, contains its CDD in its famous Article 5:

> The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all, and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually, and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. (North Atlantic Treaty 1949)

International law, of course, has its own rules concerning the circumstances under which a legal obligation may be breached.[6] Yet the CDD, besides being a legal obligation, also carries with it an interesting and important ethical component, entailing as it does: a solemn promise to undertake a future action; the prospective use of large-scale deadly force in other-defence; the objective entrustment by one (state) agent of its military security to the military protection of another (state) agent; and the subjective trust placed by one (state) agent in the future willingness of another (state) agent to militarily defend it from attack. It would seem to follow that if Ally X were to breach the CDD and so fail to defend Ally Y in Ally Y's hour of need, then Ally X would be morally blameworthy in some way – that is, unless Ally X had a valid justification for failing to fulfil its obligation. The remainder of this article is occupied with the question of whether such a justification does indeed exist and, if it does, under what circumstances it might be available to Ally X as a valid means of avoiding blameworthiness for a breach of the CDD. I start, in the next two sections, by considering and rejecting two extreme views on these interconnected questions. I then introduce and defend a third, more pragmatic view in the sixth section.

6 The most authoritative view on the conditions allowing for the legally permissible breach of treaty terms is contained in Part V of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. See 'Vienna Convention' (1969).

The idealist view on breaching the CDD

Let us begin with what I call the Idealist View on breaching the CDD. This straightforward view can be summarised as follows: *Ally X is never justified in breaching the CDD in regard to the provision of military assistance to Ally Y in the event that Ally Y has been attacked*. As can be seen, the Idealist View categorically denies that there can ever be a justification for breaching the CDD, so that Ally X will *always* be blameworthy for committing such a breach, no matter the circumstances surrounding the breach or the deleterious consequences for Ally X of upholding its commitment. This uncompromising view is grounded in a very strict and static conception of international ethics and interstate rights and duties, according to which an act or omission is morally wrong across all international contexts and in spite of any *prima facie* mitigating factors. Hence, under the Idealist View, it is not possible for any such contingent context or factor to weaken the deontic force of the CDD, including contexts and factors such as the existence of an overwhelming strategic interest on the part of Ally X in withholding military assistance to Ally Y, the high risk of significant casualties among Ally X's intervening combat personnel or the expectation of intense diplomatic blowback from the international community against Ally X. To take a recent empirical example, the failure of five members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – i.e. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus and (especially) Russia – to militarily assist sixth member Armenia in its 2020 war with Azerbaijan renders these five members morally blameworthy under the Idealist View, even if their strategic interests undoubtedly favoured nonsupport and even if support would likely have generated for them some number of human casualties and have greatly damaged their diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan (Deyermond 2018; Krivosheev 2021). Put simply, then, the Idealist View is rigid and unconditional in its reading of the CDD; as a matter of principle, it permits no exceptions when it comes to upholding and fulfilling the CDD.

Although the Idealist View has the virtue of prescriptive clarity and unambiguity, these qualities are bought at the heavy price of prescriptive nuance and flexibility once the alliance is confronted with the inherent complexity and danger of real-world collective defence scenarios. Put another way, the Idealist View is unpersuasive as a basis for interpreting the content and scope of the CDD because its interpretation of the CDD would prove, by its very starkness and strictness, deeply unreasonable in some real-life collective defence contexts. All such contexts, of course, unfold against the precarious backdrop of systemic anarchy, though some are characterised by more extreme near-term insecurity than others. At a minimum, a state that finds itself in such a radically insecurity-ridden context must, before pursuing any ancillary goal like collective defence, conduct its foreign policy so as to preserve its own fundamental military security and,

thus, maintain at a satisfactory level its probability of future survival as a state (Waltz 1979). A state that failed to conduct its foreign policy in this way would seem profoundly misguided in its preference ranking of foreign policy priorities. It would seem so misguided not only from a strategic but also arguably from an ethical and legal standpoint, since a state is made up of citizens whose basic welfare and even lives would be put at serious risk by a foreign policy that placed other priorities above those of state survival and fundamental military security, and since the right of (state) self-defence would appear to necessarily override the duty of collective defence as a matter of both international ethical norms and customary international law. One such misplaced priority would, at least under certain circumstances, be the defence of an ally that has been attacked or threatened with attack. If the state that has attacked Ally Y poses a legitimately catastrophic threat to the survival or military security of Ally X, then it is far from evident that a breach of the CDD by Ally X remains categorically unjustified. This is especially true if the threat to Ally X by the aggressor state would be carried out only in the event that Ally X were to militarily intervene in the conflict.

Let us take, for example, the case of the United States–South Korea mutual defence pact (Roehrig and Heo 2018). Suppose first that minor power South Korea has chosen to accept an enormous and potentially existential risk in order to help defend its major power ally in a conflict between the latter and China. China has signalled that, if South Korea does intervene in the conflict, it will execute an immediate and massive nuclear reprisal against numerous counterforce and countervalue targets on the South Korean mainland. South Korean and US intelligence analysts have determined this threat to be highly credible. At the same time, China has conspicuously abstained from making an analogous threat against the US mainland or overseas territories. Accordingly, by choosing – as the Idealist View would demand – to quite literally bite the bullet and fully satisfy its obligations under the CDD, South Korea would be not only drastically, but also (given its basically negligible contribution to the defence of a military superpower and the disproportionate risk surrounding its participation compared to that surrounding US participation) pointlessly and perversely, lowering its prospects of near-term survival. In doing so, South Korea would not appear to be acting in either a strategically rational or – with regard to the welfare of its 52 million citizens,[7] most of whose lives would be at stake as a consequence of their state's intervention – a morally responsible fashion. In at least this case, then, South Korea – or any similarly situated state – does seem *pro tanto* justified in committing a one-time breach of the CDD. Moreover, it is also likely to seem justified in other, comparably extreme collective defence cases, and perhaps even in some cases that are somewhat less extreme. But if this is true, then the categorical and

7 Assuming, of course, that these citizens have not explicitly consented to be killed.

unconditional Idealist View cannot be the most cogent interpretation of the CDD. Instead, the view's rigidity and dogmatic lack of consideration for the many extreme contingencies that can and do occur within the current international system make it appear strikingly implausible, and so untenable, as a normative framework for conceptualising the deontic relations that exist between allies under anarchy.

The Hobbesian View on breaching the CDD

We now consider the Hobbesian View on breaching the CDD, which is the inverse of the Idealist View. According to the Hobbesian View, whose straightforwardness is equal (if opposite) to that of its rival: *Ally X is always justified in breaching the CDD in regard to the provision of military assistance to Ally Y in the event that Ally Y has been attacked*. As can be seen, the only difference between the content of the Hobbesian View and that of the Idealist View is the presence of 'always' (versus 'never') in the former. The Hobbesian View thus asserts that, while the CDD may technically exist as a normative corollary of the formal act of alliance, it can be justifiably violated at the discretion of Ally X, for any reason whatsoever and without Ally X incurring any blameworthiness thereby. The Hobbesian View can endorse this radical understanding of allied obligations because it is grounded in a conception of international politics according to which rights, duties and the possibility of ethics itself are, particularly in the security realm, strictly subordinate to egoistic considerations of state power and interest, along with the conflictual dynamics generated by the interstate interaction of these considerations. Crucially, the power-and-interest considerations themselves are alleged to be a function of the innate unpredictability and peril of the anarchic system, which socialises states to behave in a manner that maximises power and actualises interests at the expense of all other considerations, thereby optimising chances of survival. To return to the CSTO example, the Hobbesian View would evaluate the failure of the other five CSTO members to militarily aid sixth member Armenia as completely justified, provided that these allies were acting so as to maximise their power and actualise their interests in order to optimise their chances of survival.[8] Simultaneously, it would *also* have evaluated these five allies as justified if they *had*, in fact, chosen to satisfy their CDD obligations towards Armenia, provided that these allies were acting with precisely the same motivations. What the Hobbesian View categorically denies, therefore, is that the CDD can ever be more than a normative epiphenomenon of the rational pursuit of power and interest, as the latter comprises the only feasible and operative 'norm' of state action in international politics and, by extension, alliance politics.

8 The empirical assumptions of the Hobbesian View thus partly overlap with those of certain realist conceptions of international politics; even so, I do claim that all or even most realists would subscribe to the Hobbesian View itself as a *normative* conception of alliance obligations. See Mearsheimer (2001); Morgenthau [1948] (2006); Waltz (1979).

If the Idealist View is hobbled by its radical rejection of a state's ultimate right to prioritise its own survival over the survival of an ally and to protect and preserve its fundamental military security even at the expense of an ally's security, the Hobbesian View exhibits the opposite defect: namely, the elevation of state survival, accomplished through the egoistic pursuit of power and interest, to a sort of categorical imperative in light of which the CDD (along with any other norm of interstate relations) loses all normative force. Such an imperative remains implausible even if one accepts the Hobbesian View's implicit premise that each state (including alliance members) has vis-à-vis other states (including its allies) *only* the duty to optimise its survival chances by maximising its power and actualising its interests. It remains implausible because the premise itself does not entail that an ally is never unjustified in breaching the CDD, since the acceptance of a robust obligation to defend an ally *in at least some collective defence contexts* may, *under at least some circumstances*, be the optimal means of maximising an ally's power and actualising its interests. Indeed, what is probably the leading theoretical approach to explaining alliance formation, the 'capability aggregation' model, assumes that states allying against either objective power or subjective threat believe exactly this.[9] Similarly, the competing 'security-autonomy trade-off' model retains power and interest considerations in its explanation of alliance formation but argues that these considerations often work their effects through an inter-ally exchange of military security for policy autonomy (Morrow 1991).

Nonetheless, there is good reason to think that the aforementioned premise is false and that states do have duties besides those of survival-oriented power maximisation and interest actualisation. Certainly, this is by far the dominant view within the normative IPT literature, among contemporary philosophers specialising in international ethics and global justice. Indeed, even interstate war itself is seen by the vast majority of IPT scholars, not to mention the vast majority of state leaders and policymakers, as rigorously constrained by sets of reciprocal rights and duties that bind belligerent states both before and during armed conflict, as the rich scholarly tradition of just war theory amply demonstrates.[10] What is more, positive IR scholars adopting a constructivist approach have shown that states can, and not infrequently do, perceive themselves to be bound together with their formal allies in relationships of mutual identification, trust and obligation, enabled and reinforced by processes of ally-level socialisation and norm internalisation (Adler and Barnett 1998; Barnett 1996; Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002; Johnston 2001; Risse 1996; Wendt 1999). The outcome can sometimes, if not

9 The capability aggregation model predicts that states will ally in order to additively pool their capabilities and thereby achieve synergistic efficiency gains in defence provision. See Walt (1987); Waltz (1979).

10 For a detailed overview of modern just war theory, see Lazar (2020).

always, be a cohesive and self-sustaining security community that, because it is built upon shared values, rules and practices, makes possible an (at least partially) collectivised conception of external threats, along with an equally collectivised conception of the duty to deter and defend against such threats. Alexander Wendt's influential 'cultures of anarchy' framework (1999) distinguishes between Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian cultures of anarchy, corresponding roughly to international orders characterised by enmity, rivalry and friendship, respectively. The Hobbesian View implicitly assumes that all interstate relations, including those between allies, conform to a Hobbesian culture of anarchy where egoistic self-help is the only operative logic. Yet empirical evidence suggests that many contemporary alliances – particularly NATO, the US bilateral defence pacts with Japan, South Korea and Australia, and even the European Union (EU)[11] – exhibit characteristics of Lockean or even Kantian cultures wherein restraint, reciprocity and genuine obligation play important roles (Adler 2008; Risse 1996). Examples of existing alliances displaying this degree of deontic 'thickness' include, most notably, the heavily institutionalised NATO and the aforementioned US bilateral defence pacts. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that regime type affects not only alliance credibility but also normative conceptions of alliance obligations. In democracies, the public is able to exercise accountability through electoral mechanisms over leaders who fail to honour their international commitments (Fearon 1994; Gaubatz 1996; Schultz 1999). What it is critical to stress here in the context of a normative analysis is that such accountability can arguably give rise not only to a strategic incentive to honour the aforementioned commitment, but also to a moral obligation to do this. The obligation in question is plausibly grounded in democratic legitimacy and popular sovereignty. Conversely, in the case of authoritarian regimes whose leaders face much weaker accountability mechanisms (or none at all), the normative status of alliance commitments may be different. It may not, however, necessarily be weaker, as clientelist relationships and personalistic ties may generate alternative bases for moral obligation among elites (Svolik 2012; Weeks 2008). Finally, there is even some recent experimental evidence indicating that majorities of the public *within* allied states are conscious of possessing weighty moral obligations to defend their states' allies and would support their state doing so if these allies were attacked (Tomz and Weeks 2021).

Taken together, what all of this normative and empirical work suggests is that the Hobbesian View is very likely mistaken in its almost nihilistic conception of intra-alliance ethics and, in particular, its stringently realpolitik stance on breaching the CDD. Alliances are not merely temporary marriages of convenience that parties may dissolve at will whenever strategic calculations shift. At least some

11 Since 2009, pursuant to Article 42.7 of the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU has been (among its other organisational identities) a multilateral defence pact.

alliances embody genuine normative commitments grounded in shared values, mutual identification, public authorisation and internalised obligations. The challenge, then, is to develop a normative framework that takes these obligations seriously while also recognising the legitimate constraints that anarchy and self-help imperatives place on states' ability to honour commitments under all circumstances. This is precisely what the Moderate View, developed in the next section, aims to accomplish.

The Moderate View on breaching the CDD

Having rejected both the Idealist View and the Hobbesian View as unpersuasive, in this section I propose a compromise position that is located somewhere between these two extremes and that, I argue, yields a more plausible answer to the question of if and when an ally is justified in contravening the CDD. I call this compromise position the Moderate View. In order for the Moderate View to be properly understood, however, I must first introduce Snyder's influential model of the alliance security dilemma from whose logic and concepts the view draws. In several works, Snyder (1984, 1997) builds on the classic concept of the security dilemma in IR by devising a parsimonious model of the risks and dangers embedded in security relations between allies.[12] He calls this model the alliance security dilemma. According to Snyder, this dilemma is endemic to the relationship between allies in an anarchic system and is driven by the two interlocking risks of *entrapment* and *abandonment*. In essence, entrapment occurs when a state is dragged by its ally into an objectively reckless and *de facto* offensive (if speciously defensive) war that, while strongly desired by the ally, is patently contrary to the entrapped state's interests. Entrapment happens as a direct result of the ally's being both emboldened by an expectation of military support from the entrapped state and inclined to exploit the latter's collective defence commitment.[13] Abandonment, meanwhile, occurs when a state is deserted by its ally in

12 The classic security dilemma occurs when purely defensive measures taken by State A to enhance its own security (for example, an arms buildup) render State B less secure because State B cannot be sure of the purely defensive (as opposed to offensive) motivations behind these measures. State B thus takes reciprocal defensive measures to increase its own security, causing State A to in turn reciprocate, causing State B to again reciprocate, *ad infinitum*. Hence an insecurity spiral is unintentionally initiated that leaves both states not only less secure than at the outset, but also poorer on account of the futile rounds of military spending. See Jervis (1978).

13 Importantly, this version of entrapment is quite different from how the term is used in the domestic legal context. Precise definitions of domestic legal entrapment abound among legal scholars and philosophers, but that of Stitt and James, which posits four conditions for entrapment to have occurred, is typical. It includes four characteristics: first, a law-enforcement agent *plans* a particular crime; second, the agent *induces* the target to commit it; third, the agent *arrests* the target for having committed it; fourth, *counterfactual condition*: if it were not for the agent's actions, then the . . . crime

either peacetime or wartime: i.e. either before the state has been threatened or attacked by the alliance's adversary or after this has taken place. Abandonment therefore includes, while also being conceptually broader than, the narrower act of breaching the CDD, which can only take place once a threat has been issued or an armed attack implemented against the state.

Critically, there is an inverse relationship between entrapment and abandonment: As the risk of one decreases, the risk of the other *ipso facto* increases, and vice versa. This inverse relationship produces the dilemmic aspect of the alliance security dilemma. Hence, when a state, in order to avoid being entrapped by its ally in an undesired military confrontation or conflict, deliberately distances itself from that ally's military aims, policies or actions and so creates (in the ally's mind) extreme doubt as to its own reliability, that state thereby pushes its ally towards abandonment of itself and, potentially, realignment with an ostensibly more dependable and supportive security partner. Conversely, when a state, in order to avoid being abandoned by its ally if and when the former confronts a military threat or attack, deliberately and unconditionally supports its ally's military aims, policies and actions and so creates (in the ally's mind) extreme confidence in its own reliability, that state thereby pushes its ally towards entrapment of itself in an undesired military confrontation or disastrous military conflict. Entrapment and abandonment, then, are obverse sides of the same coin.

With this brief summary of the alliance security dilemma provided, the Moderate View can be stated as follows: *Ally X is sometimes justified in breaching the CDD in regard to the provision of military assistance to Ally Y in the event that Ally Y has been attacked – namely, Ally X is justified in doing so if (1) it is reasonable for Ally X to believe that there is a high likelihood of its imminent entrapment by Ally Y and (2) Ally X cannot reduce this likelihood by clearly signalling to Ally Y its concerns*. Something to notice here before examining the jointly sufficient conditions in (1) and (2) is that the Moderate View's 'sometimes justified' verdict on CDD infringement positions it between the 'never justified' and 'always justified' verdicts of the Idealist View and Hobbesian View, respectively. It should be emphasised that 'sometimes' here implicitly includes, apart from the conditions in (1) and (2), circumstances in which Ally X's very survival is threatened or in which its fundamental military security is at stake. Put differently, the Moderate View assumes that Ally X's survival and fundamental military security are not necessarily at risk in the collective defence context at hand. This means that the conjunction of (1) and (2) amounts to a separate and additional justification,

would not have been committed by the target (1984, 114). As will readily be seen, this domestic legal version of entrapment is formally and substantively distinct from the alliance security dilemma version. I will therefore leave it aside while noting only that a comparative analysis of the two versions on both a descriptive and normative level could make for an interesting topic for future research.

independent from that which might be generated by the aforementioned existential risks,[14] for breaching the CDD.

Now let us look at the two conditions, (1) and (2). (1) stipulates that there must be a reasonable belief on the part of Ally X that a high likelihood of imminent entrapment exists. The italicised words require some clarification. 'Reasonable' means that any similarly situated state in Ally X's position could be counted on to reach, in good faith and based on objective evidence, roughly the same conclusion. 'Belief' means that Ally Y need not actually be planning to entrap Ally X in a conflict with a third state, but only that Ally X perceives Ally Y's policy or behaviour towards either itself or the third state as strongly suggesting this outcome. 'Imminent' means that the perceived risk of entrapment must fall squarely in the near term and not the medium or long term – i.e. it must be concrete and impending, not remote and hypothetical. (2), meanwhile, stipulates that there must also be an inability on the part of Ally X to reduce the imminent entrapment risk that it reasonably believes exists by means of clearly signalling its worries to Ally Y. 'Inability' means that Ally X must, in good faith, have made its best effort to signal its worries to Ally Y while ultimately failing, despite this effort, to alter the policy or behaviour of Ally Y that is seen as entailing entrapment. 'Clearly' and 'signalling' together mean that Ally X must have transmitted its concerns to Ally Y, via the appropriate diplomatic channels and at the appropriate diplomatic/ministerial level, in a fashion that allows for both the candid, unambiguous and respectful communication of these concerns and the opportunity for Ally Y to issue a timely response thereto. Finally, as already alluded to, these two conditions are only jointly sufficient for justification: If (1) is satisfied but (2) is not, then Ally X is not justified in breaching the CDD. So, if Ally X reasonably believes that there is a high likelihood of imminent entrapment of itself by Ally Y, yet has made either no effort at all or an inadequate effort to signal its concerns to its ally, then according to the Moderate View, Ally X is not justified in breaching its CDD obligations in the event that Ally Y is attacked.

We now move to the normative substance of the Moderate View. Why, one might ask, should we think that a state is justified in abstaining from militarily defending its ally (i.e. justified in breaching the CDD) due purely to the fact that conditions (1) and (2) obtain in a given alliance scenario? In what follows, I offer two distinct arguments in support of this core claim of the Moderate View. The first of these arguments holds that Ally X is intrinsically justified in breaching the CDD due to its reasonable belief in Ally Y's imminent entrapment of it. My main claim here is that a high likelihood of entrapment, reified in the form of a reasonable belief and coupled with a good faith effort at signalling concerns, frees Ally X from its duty to defend Ally Y because entrapment itself is a serious breach of Ally Y's collective defence obligation and of Ally X's right not to have its own collective defence obligation be

14 Recall that the Idealist View denies that such a justification can be generated.

exploited in a way that unduly endangers itself. The entrapment of Ally X by Ally Y contravenes Ally Y's alliance obligations vis-à-vis Ally X because it entails, as mentioned above, the exploitation by Ally Y of Ally X – or, more exactly, the exploitation of Ally X's formal promise to defend Ally Y in the event that the latter is attacked. Such exploitation contradicts the very spirit of a military alliance, which is based on the transparent and reciprocal exchange of collective defence commitments as well as on some nontrivial baseline of mutual trust and respect between members. As a consequence, by knowingly manipulating Ally X's promise of prospective assistance with the aim of compelling Ally X to participate in an unnecessary conflict that will recklessly imperil Ally X's and its own security, Ally Y is wronging Ally X and undermining the normative foundation of their formal agreement. Indeed, in the absence of this agreement, Ally Y would not be emboldened to embark on such an irresponsible campaign to begin with.

To frame the above points slightly differently, Ally Y is using the alliance as a means for which it was neither explicitly nor implicitly designed: i.e. as an instrument for permitting it to pursue an aggressive and negligent foreign policy, blatantly in contempt of its ally's welfare and wishes. By doing so, Ally Y can also be said to be using Ally X itself as merely a means towards the achievement of a purely self-interested and strategically valuable objective, and even if the process itself of achieving this objective is expected to grossly compromise Ally X's security and harm its fundamental interests. In this way, Ally Y is infringing the foundational deontological principle, first formulated by Kant [1785] (1993), that it is wrong to treat an agent as a mere means towards some given end. Kant, of course, had human persons in mind, but if states can on some ontological level be considered international persons – or even just as emergent agglomerations of individual human agencies – then the principle may well be, mutatis mutandis, meaningfully applicable.[15] Whether or not a state might be considered akin to a person, though, it remains true that Ally Y is using its Ally X in a manner to which the latter has never consented, or is ever likely to consent, to being used.

On account of Ally Y's responsibility for this markedly unjust treatment of Ally X, it is plausible that Ally Y thereby forfeits its right to receive the military assistance that Ally X would otherwise, pursuant to the CDD, owe to it – that is, Ally Y is liable to suffer the harm of not being defended.[16] This forfeiture though should best be seen as only temporary: Ally X's CDD obligation vis-à-vis Ally Y would be restored were Ally Y to begin respecting the legitimate concerns signalled by Ally X and from thereon work to cease (or drastically curtail) its entrapping conduct.

15 On the state as an international person, see Wendt (2004).

16 This formulation has been influenced by Jeff McMahan's 'responsibility account' of liability to be killed in war. McMahan (2009, Ch. 5/2011) views such liability as being grounded in a combatant's moral responsibility for posing an unjust threat.

Nevertheless, until this reversal of conduct happened, Ally X would be justified in breaching the CDD as a reciprocal and proportionate response to Ally Y's wrongdoing. The provisional outcome for the alliance as a whole, therefore, would be the complete suspension (if not cancellation) of Ally X's collective defence obligation towards its ally. In sum, then, the argument moves from the first, empirical premise of Ally X's reasonable belief in its imminent entrapment by Ally Y to the conclusion of Ally Y's temporary loss of its right to be defended and (equivalently) Ally X's justified violation of the CDD. The argument makes this move by virtue of a second, normative premise: the exploitative and agreement-breaching wrongness of Ally Y's entrapment of Ally X.

In its current form, the foregoing argument remains somewhat abstract. To better appreciate the argument, it will be helpful to consider an empirically informed hypothetical illustration. Let us take the case of the recently formed (in late 2021) mutual defence pact between France and Greece. This alliance is widely considered to have been created to deter and defend against shared French and Greek rival Turkey, and specifically against the increasingly assertive and acquisitive Turkish naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean (Psaropoulos 2021; Sokou 2021). Let us imagine that Greece has entrapped France in a naval conflict with Turkey due to a known desire on the part of a new ultranationalist government in Athens to, first, reestablish Cypriot sovereignty over Northern Cyprus (occupied and controlled by Turkey since 1974) and, second, militarily pursue enosis (political union) of Greece with Cyprus – a long-sought ambition of many ethnically Greek ultranationalists in both states. Greece plans to stealthily provoke a Turkish naval attack on a Greek-flagged drillship that is surveying for natural gas deposits in disputed Aegean Sea waters. France receives credible intelligence on Greek intentions. It perceives the prospective conflict as not only deeply contrary to its own interests and brazenly contradictive of the alliance's spirit and formal aims, but also tremendously detrimental to European and Middle Eastern security and stability. As a result, France is seriously considering breaching its CDD if Greece were to court such an unnecessary, self-interested and destructive conflict with Turkey. France communicates its entrapment concerns to Greece through high-level diplomatic channels and, when this proves fruitless, a French-requested phone call between heads of state in which the French president warns the Greek prime minister against perverting or exploiting the alliance relationship as a tool for guaranteeing its 'defence' in a de facto offensive territorial war. Nonetheless, these communications and warnings from its French ally notwithstanding, Greece's ultranationalist regime signals its determination to press on with its belligerent foreign policy.[17]

17 This scenario is constructed for analytical purposes independent of overlapping NATO obligations that both France and Greece hold. While both are NATO members – which would create additional considerations in reality – this hypothetical examines

Given Greece's plan to entrap France, the imminence of this entrapment, and the imperviousness of the Greek leadership to France's legitimate protests, the Moderate View would evaluate France's intended breach of the CDD as justified in this case, unless and until Greece reverses its entrapping policy or behaviour. According to the first argument, this breach is permissible because Greece has wilfully perverted and exploited its mutual defence relationship with France and betrayed the latter's trust for narrowly egoistic gain. Greece has thereby disregarded French interests and placed French security in grave danger for no necessary or compelling reason. It follows that Greece has forfeited its right to be militarily defended by France in the former's impending irredentist war with Turkey.

Now let us consider the second argument for the Moderate View. This argument holds that Ally X is *instrumentally* justified in breaching the CDD due to its reasonable belief in its imminent entrapment by Ally Y. In this case, my main claim is that a desire on the part of Ally Y for Ally X to uphold the CDD, combined with a reasonable belief on the part of Ally Y that there is a high likelihood of imminent breach by Ally X were Ally Y to entrap it, together make the prospect of Ally Y's entrapment of Ally X less likely. In other words, assuming legitimate entrapment concerns and a good faith but futile effort by Ally X to signal these concerns to Ally Y, the former is justified in refusing to militarily assist Ally Y because the consequences of this conditional refusal, if understood and anticipated by Ally Y, would have positive, anti-entrapment consequences both for Ally X and Ally Y in the near term and for the alliance generally in the long term. The positive consequences for Ally X would be not only its near-term non-entrapment, but also its ability to continue reaping the security-enhancing benefits of collective defence: benefits that Ally Y would also continue to reap, given that it could continue to count on Ally X upholding its CDD obligations. The positive consequences for the alliance as a whole would be a more credible deterrence capacity and (were deterrence to fail) a more formidable defence capacity vis-à-vis shared adversaries, with both consequences flowing from enhanced intra-alliance harmony and cohesion. All of this assumes, again, that Ally Y understands and anticipates the probable consequences of attempting to entrap Ally X, information that could be relatively easily communicated by Ally X to Ally Y *ex ante*, whether during the alliance formation process or after the alliance has been created. In short, then, impending breach of the CDD by Ally X would act as an effective means of dissuading Ally Y from undertaking pro-entrapment policies or actions in the first place, or of pressuring it to stop these once initiated, resulting in positive outcomes for allies and alliance both.[18]

the bilateral treaty obligations in isolation to test the normative principles at stake.

18 It should be evident that, in this second argument, it is (instrumentally valuable)

Like the first argument, the second argument could, for the sake of greater clarity, benefit from a hypothetical illustration that is grounded in a real-world alliance scenario. Let us take the case of the China–North Korea mutual defence pact (Albert 2021; Vu 2021). This asymmetric alliance is principally used by China as a vehicle for influencing North Korea's foreign policy, and by North Korea as a vehicle for protecting itself from external attack (via Chinese power) and as an economic lifeline (via Chinese trade and aid). Before examining this scenario in detail, it is important to acknowledge how regime type and power asymmetry affect alliance dynamics in ways relevant to entrapment risks and CDD obligations. The China–North Korea alliance is characterised by two features that distinguish it from the symmetric, democratic alliances often emphasised in alliance literature. The first feature is that both allied states are authoritarian regimes whose leaders do not face electoral accountability for alliance decisions. The second feature is that the alliance is highly asymmetric, with China possessing vastly greater military and economic power than does North Korea. These two features of the alliance have implications for how we should understand entrapment risks and CDD breach justifications. In terms of the shared authoritarian regime type of the allies, it is known from the work of scholars like Jessica Weeks (2008, 2012) that autocratic leaders face a different set of credibility constraints than do democratic leaders. As discussed briefly in the introduction, while democratic leaders can enhance commitment credibility through audience costs and electoral accountability mechanisms (Fearon 1994; Schultz 1999), autocratic leaders are compelled to rely upon personalistic ties, clientelist relationships or demonstrated resolve in order to render their commitments credible (Svolik 2012). In the context of entrapment risk, these facts suggest that China's ability to credibly signal its concerns to North Korea – and North Korea's incentives to heed those concerns – may operate differently than in democratic alliance contexts. North Korea's leadership does not face electoral punishment for entrapping China, though it may face other costs such as reduced Chinese economic support or even abandonment. In terms of the massive power asymmetry that exists between the allies, Morrow's (1991) security-autonomy trade-off model predicts that asymmetric alliances involve exchanges wherein larger allies provide security while smaller allies surrender policy autonomy. This suggests that China may possess greater leverage over

projected alliance outcomes that matter and not, as in the first argument, (intrinsically valuable) ally rights and obligations. The fact that the two arguments take different paths to reach the same normative conclusion – i.e. that the Moderate View is correct – is not problematic in that the two paths do not contradict, but rather complement each other. Thus the Moderate View can be correct because it is appropriately sensitive to the respective rights and obligations of the allies towards one another *and* because it leads to better ally- and alliance-level consequences than does a competing interpretation of if and when the CDD might justifiably be breached.

North Korean behaviour than would exist in a symmetric alliance. However, this leverage is not unlimited, particularly when the smaller ally possesses a source of bargaining leverage, such as the ability to engage in reckless behaviour that threatens its larger ally's interests. Such recklessness is, of course, precisely the kind of behaviour that entrapment entails (Benson 2012; Lanoszka 2018). The critical point here is not that regime type or power asymmetry can somehow nullify entrapment concerns, but rather that these alliance features affect how entrapment manifests itself in specific alliance cases and situations, as well as how the Moderate View's conditions (1) and (2) should be interpreted. With these qualifications in mind, let us turn to the hypothetical scenario.[19]

Let us imagine that North Korea desires to entrap China in a conflict with North Korea's eternal rival, South Korea. North Korea's objective in bringing about this conflict, which (as in the France-Greece case) it plans to insidiously provoke South Korea into initiating, is the forcible unification of the Korean peninsula under the authoritarian rule of the current North Korean regime. The North Korean leadership is aware that China maintains mutually beneficial economic relations and fairly good political relations with South Korea; that China opposes the unification of the Korean peninsula at present due to the presumed chaos this would cause and even more strongly opposes such unification by force; and that any attack on South Korea, even if disguised as self-defensive, would trigger the participation of South Korea's ally the United States, along with perhaps Japan, thereby threatening escalation to a region-wide, and potentially nuclear, great power war that would run roughshod over core Chinese interests. Put otherwise, the North Korean leadership is aware that it would be entrapping China if it embarked on such a perilous strategy of militarised unification. China, for its part, has reasonably deduced the existence of the objective, as well as its high likelihood and imminence, from a combination of public statements by the North Korean leadership, private statements by North Korean officials and diplomats

19 The worry might be raised here that the Moderate View is less applicable to such alliances because autocratic leaders are less constrained by moral obligations in the sense of more easily able to breach international commitments without domestic political costs. This worry misunderstands the purpose of the Moderate View. That purpose is the articulation of conditions under which CDD breach is morally justified. The Moderate Claim neither entails nor assumes that all states will either recognise or adhere to its normative terms and prescriptions. The empirical fact, then, that China's autocratic regime faces weaker domestic accountability for alliance decisions does not change the normative fact that, at least according to the Moderate View, China would be morally justified in breaching its CDD given imminent North Korean entrapment. What *may* differ between democratic and autocratic alliance contexts is the likelihood that moral prescriptions like those flowing from the Moderate View will *actually constrain* state behaviour. But this is obviously an empirical question concerning potential variation in state compliance with a moral prescription. It does not concern the normative applicability of that prescription as such.

to their Chinese counterparts, and intelligence gathered through the Chinese embassy in Pyeongyang. The Chinese premier is dispatched to Pyeongyang to unambiguously convey China's misgivings to the North Korean leadership. North Korea listens but dismisses these misgivings as exaggerated. Finally, the Chinese president himself places a phone call to the North Korean leader. Instead of merely reiterating Chinese entrapment concerns, the president explains in detail China's normative interpretation of the CDD as part of its official doctrine on collective defence ethics. This interpretation turns out to be synonymous in substance with the Moderate View, and the Chinese president subsequently hints at China's justified breach of its CDD obligations were North Korea to entrap it in a needless, irresponsible and *de facto* offensive war with South Korea and the United States for domination of the Korean peninsula. In essence, the Chinese president insinuates, should it carry out this entrapment strategy, North Korea would be fighting alone not only this time, but on future occasions as well, unless and until it forswore such entrapment.

What should we expect North Korea to do in this situation, assuming that it is at least a minimally rational actor that privileges above all its own continued survival, which would be put at grave risk were it to go to war with South Korea and the United States while China stayed neutral? Arguably, we have good reason to expect North Korea, once made aware of the Moderate View and its status as official Chinese doctrine, to decline to implement its planned policy of entrapment. Furthermore, assuming that North Korea values the considerable security and economic benefits furnished by its alliance with China, we also have good reason to expect North Korea to think very hard about the expected costs of engaging in entrapping behaviour in the future. And if we have good reason to expect these actions by North Korea, then we are entitled to at least tentatively infer that, all else being equal, the risk of entrapment should be lower in an alliance whose members accept that (1) a high likelihood of one member's entrapment and (2) an insensitivity to that member's signalled concerns, taken together, justify CDD violation by that member. More succinctly, the anti-entrapment and other harmony- and cohesion-promoting consequences (for the alliance) of subscribing to the Moderate View can themselves count as reasons in favour of that view. The China–North Korea case illustrates how the Moderate View operates in the context of an asymmetric, authoritarian alliance.

Objections to the Moderate View

In this section, I briefly consider and then reject three hypothetical objections to the Moderate View. I call these objections, respectively: the 'all-alliances-entrap' objection; the 'uncertainness-of-entrapment' objection; and the 'insufficient-harm' objection. First, the all-alliances-entrap objection. This objection criticises the Moderate View on the grounds that, allegedly, *all* alliances involve entrap-

ment by definition. Indeed, according to this objection, entrapment is one of the central functions of alliances, since by allying states formally commit to doing something that otherwise they would likely not do and that even currently they may have little strategic interest in doing – militarily defending another state. Thus entrapment is the very *point* of an alliance. Unfortunately, this objection confuses entrapment with the closely related but substantively distinct concept of 'entanglement'. Tongfi Kim nicely distinguishes between these two concepts:

> [Entanglement is] the process whereby a state is compelled to aid an ally in a costly and unprofitable enterprise *because of the alliance*. Entrapment is a form of *undesirable* entanglement [that occurs when an ally] adopts a *risky or offensive* policy not specified in the alliance agreement. (2011: 355, emphasis in original)

Kim goes on to stress that: 'In order for states to benefit from alliances, they have to accept some risk of entanglement, because the benefits come from the possibility of entanglement. However, states can in fact benefit from alliances without accepting the risk of entrapment' (2011: 355). Kim's widely accepted distinction suggests that the all-alliances-entrap objection is misguided. All alliances cannot be said to entrap; instead, all alliances can be said to entangle, with entrapment constituting a perverse and injurious subtype of entanglement. The distinction is vital: whereas entanglement is a (necessary) built-in cost of any decision to ally, entrapment is a (contingent) defect or pathology of a specific alliance, a perverse and injurious subtype of entanglement.[20] As a result, the objection might be relabelled, somewhat tautologically, the 'all-alliances-*entangle*' objection; yet this new formulation would not apply to the Moderate View, as the latter conditions justified breach of the CDD on entrapment, which is avoidable, and not entanglement, which is not. Therefore, if the Moderate View as a normative argument is going to fail, it is not going to be because of the logical inevitability of allied entrapment.

Next, the uncertainness-of-entrapment objection. This objection attacks the Moderate View by pointing to the inherent fallibility of Ally X's belief that Ally Y is planning to entrap it in the near future. Because that belief might very well be erroneous in regard to both the imminence of the entrapment and the high likelihood thereof, the Moderate View is wrong in thinking that it could ever justify CDD breach. This objection is surely correct about the fallibility inherent to making *ex ante* estimates of the probability of future entrapment. That being said, the objection is overdrawn, as it conflates a reason to be conscientious and cautious about future estimates of entrapment imminence and likelihood with

20 See Beckley (2015), however, for an argument that even entanglement can be a 'myth'.

a reason to deny the feasibility of such estimation outright. One need not, either logically or empirically, go as far as bowing to the latter imperative to be warranted in accepting the former imperative. To see why not, it is worth invoking, by analogy, the legality and ethics of preemptive versus preventive war. A preemptive war is staged in response to an epistemically near-certain and temporally imminent attack. By contrast, a preventive war is one in which both the degree of epistemic confidence in the attack's materialisation is weaker *and* the temporal proximity of the attack is more distant compared to a war staged preemptively. Crucially, both types of wars are founded on the fallible *ex ante* beliefs of the 'preempting' or 'preventing' state. Nevertheless, genuinely preemptive wars are generally considered legal under international law as well as morally permissible by most just war theorists. Preventive wars, by contrast, are almost universally considered illegal and, by most just war theorists, morally prohibited.[21] If international law and just war theory can independently make this normative distinction between preemptive and preventive war, then the Moderate View's justification of CDD breach in the face of imminent and highly likely entrapment cannot be rejected just because future entrapment is always, technically, uncertain and beliefs in its imminence always, technically, defeasible. A principled distinction can thus be drawn between the Moderate View's *preemptive* prescription and a genuinely *preventive* prescription of CDD breach, with the latter justified by non-imminent and moderately probable entrapment. This distinction blocks much of the force of the uncertainness-of-entrapment objection.

Lastly, the insufficient-harm objection. This objection contends that the Moderate View fails because the imminent and highly probable threat of entrapment is insufficiently harmful to Ally X's security interests to justify breach of the CDD. The threat of entrapment may harm Ally X's security interests in an absolute sense; yet, once the harm to be caused to Ally Y by Ally X's breach of the CDD is factored in, the latter response becomes disproportionate and so unjustified. This objection is mistaken for two reasons. First, it does not take seriously enough the significant harm that can accompany being entrapped by an ally. Recall the two empirical illustrations above: It is very counterintuitive that, in these illustrations, French and Chinese security interests are not being seriously harmed by entrapment. France faces the prospect of what would likely be a lengthy and brutal war against a major military power – Turkey; a war that has the potential to engulf the entire Mediterranean region (and perhaps beyond), severely jeopardising French military assets, economic investments and political influence. China faces the prospect, not only of a war against a major

21 There are, however, (qualified) exceptions in just war theory: see Buchanan and Keohane (2004); Luban (2004).

regional military (South Korea's), but also of escalation to a great power conflict between itself and the United States. Such a conflict would, at a minimum, profoundly destabilise the interdependent security and economic architectures that have been in place in the region since the end of the Second World War and that, from 1978 to the present day, have directly facilitated China's rise to great power status. At a maximum, such a great power war could threaten the institutional and normative foundations of the entire postwar international order from which China, all things considered, continues to benefit. Second, the objection does not take seriously enough the extraordinary gravity of being responsible for entrapping an ally. Returning to the empirical illustrations, it is obvious that Greece and North Korea, if they implemented their entrapment plans, would be blameworthy for causing the considerable harm to their respective allies just discussed. This blameworthiness for such large-scale harm would plausibly render Greece and North Korea liable to suffer the retributive harm of CDD breach. Moreover, this breach would be temporary and open to reversal, unlike the irreversibility of entrapment itself. Consequently, imposing it on Greece and North Korea, far from being disproportionate, seems if anything an act of restraint. The insufficient-harm objection, then, is unpersuasive as a repudiation of the Moderate View.

Conclusion

For states, one of the greatest risks of participating in a military alliance is that of being left high and dry by one's ally in the face of an armed attack. In this article, I have adopted a normative approach to the question of if and when an ally can be justified in breaching what I have called its collective defence duty – i.e. its duty to defend its ally in the event that the latter suffers an attack. After rejecting two extreme views on this question, I have offered what I have termed the Moderate View. The Moderate View draws on Glenn Snyder's influential concept of the alliance security dilemma in the service of proposing that a state can be justified in breaching its collective defence obligations vis-à-vis an ally if two conditions hold. First, the state must have a reasonable belief that it faces a high likelihood of imminent entrapment by its ally. Second, the state must not be able to reduce this likelihood by signalling its entrapment concerns to its ally. I have put forward two distinct arguments in favour of the Moderate View, one grounded in the rights and obligations possessed by allies in relation to one another, the other grounded in the expected anti-entrapment consequences of allied acceptance of the Moderate View. Finally, I have defended the Moderate View against several potential criticisms.

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Research article

From Almaty to Minsk: When Does the Collective Security Treaty Organization Intervene?

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Abstract
This study investigates how the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) intervenes militarily in the affairs of member states. Through comparative case study and process-tracing methodology, cases of non-intervention including Kyrgyzstan, 2005, 2010, 2020; Armenia, 2021; Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan, 2021–2; and Kursk, 2024 are compared to a single intervention that occurred in Kazakhstan, 2022. The analysis reveals that interventions are highly selective and not strictly driven by key provisions of the organisation's charter. The CSTO acts when domestic instability jeopardises a member regime's survival, specifically when the state's coercive apparatus loses reliability or control over its monopoly of violence. State breakdown within a CSTO member can create strategic risks for Moscow because the erosion of regime control over coercive institutions opens space for alternative political forces to seize power which may not be aligned with the regional hegemon's interests. The anticipation of a non-aligned government emerging from state breakdown induces the CSTO to strategically interpret member state instability through the potentiality of domestic collapse and future strategic realignment. Hence, preventing the rise of hostile regimes is a core factor behind intervention.

Keywords: *Collective Security Treaty Organization, protest, military intervention, authoritarian regionalism, repression*

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Introduction

Founded in 2002, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) once took a passive and vague stance on regional security policies, but in recent years, the organisation has become involved in coup-proofing and direct troop-led intervention into member states' internal affairs. Early on in the organisation's history, Weinstein (2007) highlighted the evolutionary nature of the CSTO and pinpointed its genesis in early Russian-inspired security agreements. These agreements took on the role of combating terrorism and extremism in the early 2000s. Weinstein noted that although unlikely, it could be possible that the alliance may result in the formation of a 'full-fledged military alliance – a postmodern Warsaw Pact that could help Russia fully realise its aspiration for leadership of the post-Soviet space' (Weinstein 2007: 168). Two decades removed, the CSTO has not become a new Warsaw Pact and interestingly enough, with great attention being cast on the Russia-Ukraine war, the nature of CSTO intervention remains poorly understood.

Scholars have acknowledged that since its formation, the CSTO has taken on roles that are evolutionary (Weinstein 2007; Bordyuzha 2011), while others have already conceptualised what a potential NATO clash with the CSTO would look like (Guliyev & Gawrich 2021), and have likewise weighed the organisation's effectiveness (Davidzon 2022). Zhirukhina (2023) argues that Russia views the CSTO as an instrument that can ensure collective security throughout the post-Soviet space and that over time, the organisation appears to have accumulated means to mitigate regional challenges. De Haas (2017) identifies similarities and differences between the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), while others have begun to assess the utility of the organisation's peacekeeping operation potential (Kornilenko 2020). MacHaffie (2024) recently highlighted the organisation's strategic ambiguity, while Nasibov (2025) pointed attention towards the organisation's collective signalling function (by measuring joint statement frequencies) and demonstrated how signalling and joint statements and declarations contribute to reinforcing regime stability in member states. Collective signalling, argues Nasibov, is a performative mechanism of authoritarian regionalism and enhances the credibility of incumbent regimes and elite cohesion. Cross-border wars and clashes, parliamentary elections as well as protests all are significantly correlated with CSTO joint statements, and Kyrgyzstan and Belarus are the most active participants in joint declarations.

When it comes to intervention and the direct deployment of troops, for the CSTO to intervene, it requires a formal invocation of aggression under its charter along with 1) a consensus among member states; 2) the host government's request for assistance; 3) an absence of objections from any member whose interests might be directly affected by intervention. The CSTO's operational basis thus

appears to be contingent on political unanimity and internal cohesion among allies. This study asks what conditions CSTO troops are likely to intervene under? Thus far, scholarship on the CSTO has been heavily focused on its institutional evolutionary development. On one hand, this is somewhat surprising given the relevance of this alliance for contemporary geopolitical struggles and conflicts that are ongoing in Eastern Europe (and elsewhere), but on the other hand, very little has been written about the interventional nature of this organisation when it comes to actual deployment of its troops. The way that the organisation has thus far interpreted a key Article (4) of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) has ranged from being either deliberately incompatible to vaguely erratic. Because of these inconsistencies, we still do not know when and why the CSTO has intervened in member states' political affairs. To address this gap in knowledge, the present study carries out a comparative analysis of the CSTO and numerous political instability events. The research design of this study is based on comparative case study methodology and process tracing (George & Bennett 2005), wherein cases featuring the presence of the outcome (intervention) are compared to cases that did not result in the outcome (no intervention).

Sequences found in episodes of political and territorial instability are given attention. Comparative analyses are first carried out on non-interventions which include Kyrgyzstan, 2005, 2010 and 2020; Armenia, 2021; Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan, 2021–2; and Kursk, 2024. These are then contrasted to interventions in an anti-governmental wave of dissent that occurred in Kazakhstan, 2022. Findings reveal that the CSTO tends to intervene only when a member state's internal security structures are compromised or become unreliable – entailing risk of state breakdown. State breakdown within a CSTO member can create strategic risks for Moscow because the erosion of regime control over coercive institutions opens up space for alternative political forces to seize power. The latter is especially poignant in relation to political and ideological forces that are not aligned with Russian regional interests. This indicates that there is a highly selective nature of CSTO interventions which are not strictly bound by key points in the organisation's charter. Specifically, the CSTO has only carried out one direct deployment of troops which indicates that it intervenes when internal instability threatens member state regime survival rather than in cases involving external threats or border disputes.

The order of this study is as follows. I first review literature on the historical contexts upon which the CSTO was formed. Emphasis is placed on the Warsaw Pact (WP) and different dynamics including the historical makeup of this entity in relation to the CSTO, organisational capacities, coup-proofing as well as counterbalancing strategies. Subsequently, a research design section is put forward to explain the comparative methodology that is utilised in this study and how the outcome of intervention is operationalised. This is followed by empirical analysis

which begins first with non-interventions and then shifts to intervention. The final sections include a discussion surrounding the implications of this inquiry with relation to scholarship on illiberal regionalism and a conclusion that summarises the findings of the study and its limitations.

Historical backdrop

Any inquiry into the CSTO has to be considerate of the antecedent military alliance that came before it. Throughout most of the Cold War, the Warsaw Pact dictated political affairs in its member states. In its 36-year existence, numerous turbulent events arose within the Soviet sphere of influence and the most significant of these incidents included attempted revolutions that were aimed at overthrowing domestic communist political elites. Members of the WP included Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union (Albania and Romania later became politically misaligned with the Soviet Union). In 1953, domestic disturbances arose in different parts of Eastern Europe – most notably, challenges were posed towards incumbent governments and communist and socialist political affairs. Soviet troops intervened through the use of mechanised military equipment, most notably tanks in cases such as the GDR in 1953 or Hungary in 1956. Subsequently, Warsaw Pact allied troops intervened in the Prague Spring, 1968. Soviet-led intervention across this military alliance featured particular policies and strategies that sought to upkeep socialist ideology throughout state institutions via counterbalancing, coup-proofing along with a range of other security measures. This had a direct impact on prospects for collective action and the costs of waging a potential revolution up until the emergence of M. Gorbachev and his abandonment of the former 'Brezhnev Doctrine', which entailed the USSR, via the Warsaw Pact, intervening in member states militarily if incumbent communist political status quos were threatened (Anisin 2020). Scholars have assessed the characteristics of the Warsaw Pact along with civil-military relations (Kramer 1984; Barany 1993), the overarching role of WP-led intervention (Jones 1980; Bluth 2004; Muehlenbeck & Telepneva 2019) and the Brezhnev doctrine (Loth 2001). The attention has been given to the behaviour of allies within the WP (Nelson 2019), to specific crises and political dissent at different points in time of the Warsaw Pact including incidents of mutiny (Rosen 1985), the Polish crisis of 1956 (Machcewicz 1995; Persak 2013), resistance throughout the GDR (Pfaff 2001), the Hungarian attempted revolution of 1956 (Mark & Apor 2015; McCabe 2019), the Prague Spring, 1968 (Sur 2006; Stolarik 2010), the internal political clash with Romania (Alexiev 1981), the Polish Solidarity movement (Paczkowski & Byrne 2007), anti-nuclear protests (Żuk 2017) and to the collapse of communism in Europe that began in 1989 (Ash 2014; Anisin 2020). Although many would consider the Warsaw Pact to be a relic of Cold War history, the contemporary CSTO has roots in the Warsaw Pact, although the

organisation operates on a smaller scale and has much less political power. The CSTO, as this study will reveal, also has responded to political stability across the domestic contexts of its member states.

As described by Anisin (2020), Moscow functioned as an exogenous principal in relation to Warsaw Pact member states' domestic security forces. Its response to revolutionary upheavals was swift and brutal – tanks, soldiers and armoured vehicles were brought in to occupy physically strategic areas in a member state and security organs directly intervened in state institutions to ensure allegiance to socialist values. However, once the Berlin Wall collapsed, the Soviet Union lost its first ally. Dissent then spread like wildfire throughout the rest of the Warsaw Pact states leading to the fall of communist governments throughout Europe and eventually the dissolution of the USSR (Beissinger 2009). As territorial disintegration, pro-democratic national revolutions and ethnic conflicts spread throughout the entire perimeter of the Soviet Union, an absence of political will by the Soviet Politburo along with the fast-paced disintegration of the WP resulted in NATO declaring that the WP was no longer an enemy in July of 1990. In November of that year, NATO and the WP signed the CFE Treaty which formalised the end of the Cold War. The WP was subsequently dissolved in July 1991 (Mastny & Byrne 2005).

The Collective Security Treaty Organization

After the WP was dissolved, a new organisation gradually replaced some of its security mechanisms when it came to dealing with post-Soviet political geopolitical affairs. The CSTO was established on 7 October 2002, and has a genesis in earlier agreements which included the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the 1992 Collective Security Treaty (Weinstein 2007: 168). Members of the CSTO include Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan was also a member up until 2012, when a disagreement arose surrounding its hosting of a US military base to facilitate troop withdrawal from Afghanistan (Guliyev & Garwich 2021: 9). The aims of the CSTO 'are to strengthen peace and international and regional security and stability, and to defend on a collective basis the independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of member states' (Guliyev & Garwich 2021: 9). Currently, the CSTO has observer status in the UN General Assembly and the organisation also signed a Joint Declaration on cooperation with the UN Secretariat back in 2010 (Guliyev & Garwich 2021). Further, Article 4 of the CSTO is similar to NATO's Article 5. It is about mutual defence among member countries and necessitates that if one member is attacked, all the other members will treat it as if they were attacked too – with the aim of collective protection of each member's land and sovereignty against external threats (Collective Security Treaty Organization 1992). Although the term 'attack' refers to armed aggression, it may also be interpreted as any

military action or invasion by an external force that threatens the sovereignty or security of a member country. When an attack occurs, upon the request of the affected member state other member states are beholden to provide instant assistance ranging from military support to other forms of aid and resources. These collective defence actions are carried by the right to self-defence as observed in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and member states must inform the United Nations Security Council of any measures taken under this provision. They also are required to comply with the provisions that are outlined in the UN Charter.

As subsequent sections will reveal, 'attacks' on sovereignty can come internally from the populace of a given member state and the most threatening attacks thus far have appeared to have been driven by civilian-based collective action against the political status quo. Indeed, the geostrategic configuration under which the CSTO was established was much more different than that of the Warsaw Pact. After the Soviet collapse, bipolarity became absent in the international system and the previous hegemon, Russia, had experienced a decade of economic, political and social strife – numerous conflicts (including two Chechen wars) resulted in significant hardships for its armed forces. At this point in time, the topic of national sovereignty of former states formed key policy preferences of incumbent governments which inevitably retracted power away from the CIS and the 1992 security treaty. Ethnic conflicts led to a decade that was marked by a lack of cooperation between Russia and countries that were former Soviet republics. In the early 2000s, CSTO members started to address the following issues: environmental security, drug trade, human trafficking and organised crime (Weinstein 2007: 174). Article 8 was particularly important as it enabled states to coordinate and unite efforts to fight against international terrorism and transnational crime in a time period when discourses on the 'war' on terror were salient. For example, on 14 June 2009, the organisation approved a plan for its member states to combat illegal migration via coordination mechanisms between security authorities in each state (Bordyuzha 2011: 344). Subsequent security policies were crafted in the spheres of information technology security and emergency responses to both natural and man-made situations (Bordyuzha 2011: 346). Kropatcheva (2016) highlights the complexity in how Russia has exercised power with relation to CSTO policy and argues that it uses the organisation to pursue unilateral ambitions, which in turn, has fostered 'instrumental multilateralism' within the CSTO. Priority in achieving these ends is given to what Bordyuzha plausibly contends to be political means (Bordyuzha 2011: 339). Along similar lines, both non-members of the CSTO – Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – have bilateral agreements with Russia that cover strategic partnership and military cooperation; and over time, Russia has sought to enhance the organisation's military capabilities across Central Asia (Zhirukhina 2023).

This brings us to a salient factor of peacekeeping which clearly sets the CSTO apart from the Warsaw Pact. The CSTO created a peacekeeping mechanism in

2004, and since then, the reach of peacekeeping operations has remained quite vague. Nevertheless, peacekeeping is clearly an emulation of the UN PKOs and evolving global norms surrounding conflict prevention. The CSTO peacekeeping function was meant to serve as an 'early warning system' that would aid conflict resolution in emerging conflicts. The usage of peacekeeping forces has been implemented only once thus far, during political instability in Kazakhstan (Zhirukhina 2023). The lack of usage of peacekeepers, however, does not mean that the CSTO has been absent from intervening in its member states' internal political affairs. In total, Zhirukhina (2023) estimates that the organisation's peacekeeping troop numbers are around 3,000 military personnel and 600 law enforcement personnel. More significantly, the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces have 20,000 troops. In recent years, increases in military drills and training have been observed in the CSTO such as the 'Cobalt-2021' exercises which were held in Tajikistan (along with Echelon-2021; Search-2021; Interaction-2021) (CSTO 2021).

Similar to the WP, Russia is the principal decision maker within the CSTO, which is also why some, such as Weitz (2018), have argued that the CSTO enables Russia to carry out its foreign policy preferences at an economic advantage and through selling arms at profitable prices. Guliyev and Garwich (2021) demonstrate that the CSTO had a lack of involvement in secessionist conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), Abkhazia/South Ossetia in Georgia and Crimea/Eastern Ukraine. The authors contend that passivity is a sign of weak organisational capacity and a weak Russian hegemony (Guliyev & Garwich 2021: 16). The CSTO, argue the authors, is a weak international organisation when compared to NATO. Conceptually, we must consider that both the Warsaw Pact and CSTO, respectfully, are situated in comparatively distinct periods of history and may not have any direct analogous comparative allegiances. The WP exerted great power not only because of its highly militarised nature, but also because the principal decision maker (the Soviet Union) functioned through a war mobilisation economy. This type of economic setup was completely different from anything that can be observed today. In contrast, the CSTO is dominated by a weaker Russian Federation that currently only has a fraction of the economic and military power that the Soviet Union had. The geopolitical configurations that dominated the period of the Cold War during the Warsaw Pact and those that have been present (and evolving) since 2002 are also markedly different. The threat of a clash between Russia and NATO is no longer bound to the theatre of Central Europe, but is now on the border of Russia and former Soviet territories along with Finland. At the time of writing this study, the conditions that surround CSTO intervention remain unclear, and scholars have yet to identify the key variables that are associated with the organisation's deployment of troops.

Research design

The methodological logic driving case selection in this study is premised on examining cases in which the deployment and intervention of CSTO troops or agents occurred versus those in which it did not. In other words, attention is given to a set of cases that arose in contexts where it directly intervened in member states' political affairs overtly. Overt operations feature direct usage of CSTO troops. This outcome is treated as intervention which contrasts with non-intervention. With the latter, a given instance of political or territorial instability may have arisen in a member state of the CSTO, but the organisation did not respond. CSTO intervention in member states' domestic political crises is operationalised dichotomously – intervention captures instances where CSTO troops or agents are deployed. Non-intervention captures cases where similar instability unfolded without CSTO deployment. Focus is placed on the organisation's behavioural response to comparable threats across cases (George & Bennett 2005). The methodological approach will draw on structured and focused comparisons as well as process-tracing. Specifically, the structured and focused comparison tool can be used to engage in cross-case analysis and involves posing a set of standardised questions to each case and, in turn, this enables researchers to observe consistency across a sample of cases as well as deviations. Likewise, case studies that are based on structured and focused comparisons enable us to identify insights into potential causal mechanisms that are empirically salient across different contexts.

George and Bennett noted that 'the method of structured, focused comparison requires that the researcher ask the same set of questions of each case under study in order to generate comparable data' (George & Bennett 2005: 67). By applying this method to the cases in which the CSTO did not intervene (non-intervention) to those in which it did, this study will implement a constant analytical framework across varying contexts within the CSTO's sphere of influence. Events of interest that went into case inclusion (and non-inclusion) range from instances of political instability induced by protest and dissent, ethnic clashes, border disputes and incursions of foreign armies. Cases of non-intervention include: Kyrgyzstan, 2005, 2010; 2020; Armenia, 2021, Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan, 2021–2 and Kursk, 2024. Cases of intervention include Kazakhstan, 2022. This comparative approach equates to a most-similar systems design in which cases are broadly comparable along structural dimensions. Each case features a state that has membership in the CSTO, a post-Soviet legacy and similar shared institutional architecture. By maximising contextual similarity and concurrently allowing the outcome variable to vary, such an approach enables me to isolate conditions that distinguish intervention from non-intervention. Furthermore, process-tracing is utilised to identify the chain of events that led to the CSTO intervening. This methodological tool involves 'the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of

research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator' (George & Bennett 2005: 205).

Through process-tracing, I investigate key instances of decision-making in each case and contrast sequences of events in cases where intervention occurred to those in which it did not. This is done attuned to the presence or absence of four core conditions which include protest activity (mobilisation that threatens the head of state), ethnic conflict, foreign military intrusion as well as security force reliability. Each condition captures characteristics of instability dynamics relevant to CSTO intervention. These variables are used to compare how different configurations of factors impact the CSTO's decision to intervene or remain passive. In terms of case inclusion, readers may wonder why certain cases have been included in this study while others were not. For example, when it comes to the Ukrainian Armed Forces' incursion into Russian territory (the Kursk oblast in August of 2024), this case has been included in the sample because it constitutes a direct empirical example of the CSTO's Article 4 – wherein an external force enters onto the territory of a member state and threatens its territorial integrity. Recall that Article 4 is premised on the potential threat of an 'attack' that typically constitutes armed aggression or military action by an external force that endangers the sovereignty or security of a member country. In July 2021, there was also an incursion of a foreign country's armed forces into a member state's territory during a border incident which involved Azerbaijani forces going into Armenian territory. The primary objective of this study is not to develop a comprehensive theory of intervention, but it does nevertheless rely on a conceptual account of this phenomenon in order to explain why the CSTO acted in certain cases and not in others. Bull's (1984) framework of intervention is useful here as it implied that intervention is an act in which one political authority intrudes into the internal affairs of another (and typically, this is justified or exercised by the more powerful actor). As such, CSTO actions can be viewed as a form of hierarchical intervention within a regional security community that is dominated by the Russian Federation. It is plausible to assume that CSTO deployments empirically operate somewhere between the poles of collective defence and hegemonic stabilisation, and even though interventions are formally multilateral, they are often driven by asymmetric capacities attuned to Russia's political and military leverage. As such, CSTO interventions comprise legal and political actions that are driven by its dominant members in order to preserve internal order and regional alignment. From this, it is possible to hypothesise that interventions occur where power asymmetry coincides with perceived threats to regime stability. Vice versa, comparable cases and crises without such alignment are likelier to result in non-intervention.

Empirical Analysis

This inquiry starts by focusing on instances of political instability and crises that arose but did not result in or bring about a CSTO response of troop deployment.

Specifically, cases that featured border disputes, ethnic clashes and military-based armed conflict are drawn on first. Subsequently, attention is placed on a case featuring intervention and deployment of troops along with an analysis of counter-example cases stemming from protest uprisings in 2005 and 2020 in Kyrgyzstan in which revolutionary uprisings occurred but the CSTO did not intervene. Each of the aforementioned conditions are listed in Table 1 in which the presence and absence of conditions are coded in each case beginning with 1) whether or not there were threatening active protests; 2) whether or not there were ethnic clashes either between ethnic groups within a member state or due to ethnic clashes with another member state's population; 3) whether or not there was an intrusion by a foreign non-member military power; 4) whether or not security forces were reliable or not.

Table 1: Characteristics of Interventions and Non-Interventions

Case	Protest	Ethnic Clashes	Foreign Non-Member Intrusion	Security force Uncertainty
Non-interventions				
2010 Southern Kyrgyzstan	No	Yes	No	No
2021 Armenia	No	Yes	Yes	No
2021–2 Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan	No	Yes	No	No
2024 Kursk	No	No	Yes	No
Interventions				
2020 Belarus	Yes	No	No	Yes
2022 Kazakhstan	Yes	No	No	Yes

Source: Author

Table 1 compares CSTO intervention and non-intervention and lists the presence or absence of four conditions. Across the six cases of non-intervention, at least one destabilising factor was present which was mass protests in Kyrgyzstan (2005, 2020), ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan (2010) and along the Tajik–Kyrgyz border (2021–22), as well as external incursions in Armenia (2021) and Russia's Kursk region (2024). However, none of these situations combined internal unrest with a loss of control over state coercive institutions. In contrast, in the sole case of intervention (2022 Kazakhstan), both large-scale protests and the breakdown of security force reliability occurred.

Southern Kyrgyzstan – 2010

Back in April 2010 in Kyrgyzstan, the Kurmanbek Bakiyev-led government collapsed after large-scale dissent which included numerous repressive episodes that brought about civilian fatalities. Following this, constitutional reform was carried

out, but Kyrgyz and Uzbek groups began to form informal security organisations and the government and police forces were largely ineffective in maintaining order. During this time ethnic rhetoric increased, with both Kyrgyz and Uzbek leaders using chauvinist messaging to mobilise support from their communities. The result was a rapid escalation of violence, as both sides viewed the other as a threat to their security and status. The lack of formal state intervention further contributed to the situation, allowing informal ethnic security groups to operate with impunity, ultimately leading to mass violence and displacement. Ethnic clashes ensued between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south of the country. Roza Otunbaeva requested the CSTO's peacekeeping forces to be deployed to ease tension and prevent further ethnic clashes, but member states did not agree to this request and opted to provide material support instead.

This case illustrates how a political crisis ensued after the ousting of Kurmanbek Bakiyev, but instability did not prompt CSTO intervention. Ethnic clashes caused hundreds of fatalities and displaced many civilians. It is estimated that upwards of 400,000 ethnic Uzbeks were displaced from their homes and in turn many fled to neighbouring Uzbekistan for safety (BBC News 2010). Notably, Commercio (2018) contends that structural violence from the Soviet period fuelled these riots and political violence in 2010.

It was reported that Kyrgyz mobs carried out attacks on residents in Uzbek neighbourhoods of Osh and in Jalal-Abad. Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan's interim government had significant problems in establishing a monopoly over violence. Ash (2022) argues that state weakness, coupled with chauvinist nationalist rhetoric, fostered support for interethnic violence. In carrying out a survey in Southern Kyrgyzstan, Ash tested whether individuals who trusted informal ethnic security providers were likelier to support violence when exposed to chauvinist rhetoric. The control group received a neutral message unrelated to ethnicity. Results revealed that the chauvinist message increased support for ethnic violence among respondents who trusted informal security providers – the perception of state weakness leads individuals to seek security from ethnic groups. Ash argues that in contexts where the state is weak and unable to provide security, ethnic groups can viably become alternative providers of protection and when combined with chauvinist rhetoric can lead to widespread support for violence.

As such, despite escalating violence and the Kyrgyz government's appeals for assistance, the CSTO did not intervene with troops. It only provided logistical support to Kyrgyz authorities which included supplying humanitarian aid and intelligence information for securing the Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan border. Likewise, representatives from the organisation also expedited discussions between the interim Kyrgyz government and other regional powers, but this response was perceived as inadequate. At the time and in the aftermath of violence, the CSTO's non-intervention led to calls for reform within the organisation. Many

analysts argued that the crisis exposed the organisation's weakness in addressing internal security threats.

Armenia – 2021

At the start of summer 2021, substantial political turmoil arose in Armenia when parliamentary elections were called after Armenia's military defeat in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. This military conflict brought about pervasive discontent with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan who signed a ceasefire agreement that was interpreted by many as a concession of territorial control in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Elections in June 2021 were thus viewed as a snap referendum on his incumbency, yet surprisingly, Pashinyan's Civil Contract Party won in what turned out to be a crucial victory and a majority in parliament. High levels of socio-political polarisation ensued post-election and protests arose. By July 2021, incursions were carried out by Azerbaijani forces in Armenian territory throughout the pro vinces of Syunik and Gegharkunik – near the border between the two countries. Azerbaijan had attempted to justify these actions in claiming that its forces were adjusting positions in disputed territory. Interestingly enough, it drew from what were argued to be inaccuracies in Soviet-era maps that were used to delineate the border. In response, Armenia expectedly condemned these incursions and labelled them as illegal which was followed by increased military activity and preparedness. Estimates indicated that Azerbaijan had advanced up to 40 square kilometres (Broers 2021). These incursions were undoubtedly the most significant escalation since the ceasefire deal that was reached in November 2020 (led by Russia) to end the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Strategically, the areas under attention are of importance for both sides – the Syunik region borders Iran and is a known passage for engaging in trade. Likewise, other areas were robust in relation to maintaining regional connectivity to commerce with Turkey. Furthermore, in attempting to deal with these incursions, the incumbent Armenian government sought out international support, but to no avail. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan even suggested that Russian border outposts should be set up along the length of Armenia's border (Reuters 2021). The CSTO was not drawn upon and remained inactive. At the time, CSTO Secretary-General Stanislav Zas stated that Azerbaijani troops entering into Armenian regions do not fall under the CSTO charter on collective defence, specifically that 'we must understand that the potential of the CSTO is activated only in the event of aggression or attack. Here we are dealing, in fact, with a border incident' (Dovich 2021). Numerous Armenian politicians criticised both Zas and the CSTO more broadly for their lack of action in both 2020 and 2021.

Three years later, in the summer of 2024, Armenia formally initiated discussions of attempting to leave the CSTO – it suspended participation in the organisation's summits and cancelled joint military exercises. What's more, Armenian officials

also accused Russian peacekeepers who were deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2022 and thereafter of failing to prevent Azerbaijan's offensive (Bellamy 2024). Armenia's decision to join the International Criminal Court also angered Russia and has hitherto been interpreted by many as a 'pivot' towards the West. In terms of the non-intervention of the CSTO, we can observe how the organisation interpreted these events as being largely 'domestic' in their nature – two former Soviet republics in conflict with one another and as disputes that were not factually applicable to the charters of the organisation. As state breakdown did not occur, non-aligned political groups did not emerge to fundamentally change the course of events. There was no significant power vacuum nor were state institutions threatened to be taken over by opposition movements or nationalist factions to potentially reorient the country. If such nonaligned groups did emerge in 2021, they could have potentially sparked a CSTO intervention. Or an outcome such as the suspension of Uzbekistan in 2012 from the organisation may have ensued. Paradoxically, as of 2025, Armenia froze its membership in the CSTO (and may leave the organisation in 2026).

Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border clashes (2021–2)

Similar to the aforementioned Armenian case, in April 2021, clashes also erupted along a disputed border of not only two former Soviet republics, but also between two CSTO members – Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Dozens of fatalities occurred on both sides. McGlinchey (2021) accurately summarises this outbreak in conflict as a complex mixture of failed resource management, unclear borders, illicit trade as well as nationalism. It is estimated that the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan spans more than 974 kilometres, but only 504 kilometres are marked (CPAB 2024).

This conflict was sparked by a lack of water and adverse water infrastructure policies in the Fergana Valley (an area of substantial population density). The Golovnoi water intake facility is used to control processes of distribution of water from the Ak Suu and Isfara Rivers to populations in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. For years, this particular centre has functioned as a focal point of contention. Tensions escalated in April 2021 as both countries made competing claims over the facility – each was accusing the other of trying to take control of strategic resources. Here, borders that were drawn during the Soviet era were, up until the outbreak of the conflict, disputed. Over several days, dozens of civilians, armed combatants and soldiers died as a result of violent exchanges. Indeed, from the outside looking in, one can easily observe how, throughout the Fergana Valley, historical competition between different groups has been salient and has contributed to socio-political instability. Yet, there are other important dynamics at play in this context. As noted by Sogojeva (2022), the presence of the Russian Armed Forces in Tajikistan has remained consistent since the dissolution

of the Soviet Union. In December 1992, Russian troops were involved in combat in Dushanbe and played a role fighting anti-government insurgents during the course of the Tajik civil war.

Currently, the presence of the Russian military (estimated at 7,000 troops) is on track to continue until 2042 (Sogojeva 2022). The Tajik military, in contrast, has fewer than 10,000 active soldiers and was only created in 1993. Along similar lines, Tajikistan's economy is reliant on remittances from Russia – approximations indicate that back in 2008, 44% of Tajikistan's GDP was reliant on remittances and this number dropped to only 30% by 2015 (Sogojeva 2022). Although the CSTO was active in attempting to ease tensions between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, it had a very limited response, did not send troops and its lack of action was interpreted by many as a salient sign of organisational weakness. McGlinchey makes a plausible set of claims by noting that this particular outbreak in conflict symbolised the fragility of peace in post-Soviet Central Asia and an overarching difficulty of maintaining regional stability in the CSTO. Violence exacerbated existing problems that stemmed from rent-seeking, illicit trade and what many consider to be a contraband economy. Finally, both Kyrgyz and Tajik leaders attempted to use the conflict to strengthen their own political and ideological platforms – nationalist rhetoric significantly increased until an agreement was made to de-escalate the situation.

Conflict re-arose in September of 2022 when Tajik troops entered Kyrgyzstan with the help of tanks and armoured personnel carriers. Tajik forces also used mortars to shoot at Kyrgyz villages and airfields near the Batken area. Upwards of 140,000 inhabitants were evacuated from the Batken and Osh regions. By this point in time, Russian President Putin urged the leaders of both states to resolve the situation peacefully and diplomatically. The CSTO sent diplomatic representatives and observers to the conflict area to mediate, although the end outcome of mediation was temporally constricted.

As argued by Castillo (2023):

> Conflicts in Ukraine, Karabakh, and along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border all demonstrate a number of vulnerabilities in the CSTO. Most crucially, the organization relies on Russia's role as a leader, mediator, and security guarantor, when it is no longer clear whether Russia is willing or able to live up to these roles.

Into late 2023, as a result of a lack of cohesion within the CSTO, Bishkek and Dushanbe actively pursued a local arms race – both neighbouring countries expanded their arsenals with advanced weaponry. Kyrgyzstan acquired Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones. Meanwhile, in 2022, Iran established a drone manufacturing facility in Tajikistan giving it access to Ababil-2 drones. Belarus also emerged

as a key military supplier to Kyrgyzstan, but has not given analogous support to Tajikistan (Castillo 2023).

Kursk – 2024

The final case of non-intervention happened quite recently and is still a part of an ongoing military conflict. In early August 2024, the Ukrainian Armed Forces sent several brigades comprised of upwards of 10,000 soldiers into the Kursk region of Russia. This incursion marked the first territorial invasion of Russia since WWII and caught many by surprise. Although still quite recent, many believe that this offensive was implemented in an attempt to disrupt Russian military operations in Donbas by forcing Russia to divert its troops from the East to slow down a long stemming offensive. There also were other strategic considerations discussed in public and media discourse – ranging from Ukraine being able to potentially take over a large nuclear power station in the Kursk Oblast to even possibly capturing the city of Kursk itself. Along with the military logic inherent to this incursion and its associated operation, there was also a clear political logic – in light of potential faltering Western support for Ukraine, the incursion aimed to increase confidence in Western powers' support for the Ukrainian Armed Forces and at the same time hypothetically increase the bargaining position of Ukraine in a potential negotiated settlement.

The first month of this incursion led to heavy conflict in the Kursk Oblast, but the incursion did not force Russia to divert any of its troops from the main portion of the front in the East. This is significant as it was reported that in just the first seven days, Ukrainian forces claimed to have seized 1,000 square kilometres of Russian territory. By 15 August, Ukraine had established military administrative units to govern the territories it controlled within the Kursk Oblast. For our purposes, the critical aspect of this incursion is that it did not spark a CSTO troop intervention, even though it was arguably the most significant instability incident induced via territorial incursion in any CSTO member states' history in the organisation. Article 4 of the CST defines aggression as an armed attack that threatens a member state's safety, stability, territorial integrity or sovereignty – such an attack is, according to the CST, supposed to be regarded by all other member states as an act of aggression against the entire treaty alliance. The attack by the Ukrainian Armed Forces on Kursk surely constituted all of the right conditions that would fulfil Article 4's requirements, yet Russia did not call on or bring CSTO troops in to help. In late 2024, it was reported that North Korea sent troops to aid Russia in Kursk, which made this conflict more internationalised in nature.

Interestingly enough, Russian officials sought to calm things down, rhetorically, by putting out arguments that the CSTO was not needed in this situation and, what's more, the incursion into Kursk was framed as a terrorist attack by an

adversary and thus officials argued it warranted a counter-terrorism operation. For example, on 9 August the first deputy chairman of the Russian State Duma's Committee on CIS Affairs (Konstantin Zatulin) argued that Russia had no plans to seek assistance from CSTO partners in response to the incursion and noted that Russia, as the dominant power in the CSTO, does not require outside help to defend its own territory. Around this time, relevant actors in the blogosphere were questioning the entire value of the CSTO and some were arguing that despite Russia's investment in the alliance's development, the country would not turn to its partners for support (Institute for the Study of War 2024). Ultimately, the Kursk case reveals that Article 4 of the CSTO is not actually interpreted to its intent. If the actual security structures underlying a given polity of a member state are not threatened, then the CSTO does not intervene.

Interventions

In contrast to the previously-mentioned cases of non-intervention, this section will delve into an instance in which the CSTO did intervene. This case illustrates how the organisation engages in a selective approach to intervention as it deploys troops when regime survival is threatened. The process that unfolded during this intervention can be categorised as follows: initial onset of instability → erosion of a member state's coercive control → CSTO's internal deliberation and decision-making → intervention outcome. Empirically, as instability ascends inside a given member state, it impacts regime control over coercive institutions (security services, armed forces, ministry of interior troops, police, etc.). In turn, member governments and CSTO leadership interpret and respond to that situation attuned to the degree of erosion of coercive control in the member state and the makeup of opposition groups who seek to overtake it. This is particularly why the CSTO did not intervene during large-scale protests that arose in the summer of 2020 in Belarus, where domestic security forces were not fragmented and repressed opposition through mass arrests.

Kazakhstan – January 2022

Kazakhstan maintained a comparatively long period of political stability under the Nazarbayev regime until a significant economic dislocation arose in 2022. Although Nazarbayev himself no longer held office, widespread public unrest erupted against the incumbent authorities after the government decided to discontinue its subsidies for liquefied natural gas at the tail end of 2021. In the span of a few days, prices significantly increased which caused uproar among the population. At first, dissent arose in Zhanaozen (a city of around 80,000 inhabitants in the West), and then spread to Almaty. Protesters then turned their grievances into general anti-governmental demands which led to the formation of a regime change-seeking movement. Between 2 and 11 January 2022, a rapid

sequence of events unfolded that marked one of the more volatile political periods in Kazakhstan's recent history. The end outcomes of the protests were quite transformative – not only did CSTO forces intervene in the internal affairs of a member state for the first time in its 20-year history, but the defence minister (Murat Bektanov) was removed, as was the prime minister (Askar Mamin) along with his government, and former leader Nazarbayev was removed from his chairman position in the country's Security Council. Likewise, the price of fuel was lowered back to an acceptable level (to protesters) and was capped for half a year.

President Tokayev threatened to 'liquidate' protesters (Kriener & Brassat 2023). Hundreds were killed as a result. Protesters used dispersed strategies ranging from marches to occupations, rioting and some even took up arms and engaged in firefights with security forces in Almaty. The government enabled its security organs and forces to use deadly force. The Kazakh incumbent leader directly ordered security forces and police to shoot at protesters. In one of his justifications for issuing this order, he noted that terrorists were damaging property, and that orders were given to shoot at them (Deutsche Welle 2022a). Furthermore, the CSTO was sent in when protesters began to gain the upper hand over security forces and police. Protesters seized the Almaty city hall and set it on fire. On 5 January 2022 protesters successfully took over Almaty airport which is a major international transit hub. Tokayev claimed that 'terrorist' activists and gangs had seized large infrastructure facilities at the airport and took over five planes (Deutsche Welle 2022b). This led Tokayev to call on the CSTO. Specifically, Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty was drawn upon which was the first implementation of this Article in the history of the organisation (Kriener & Brassat 2023: 277). The response was granted, and an estimated 2,500 troops were sent, which Kriener and Brassat (2023) describe as being from Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan – with the majority being Russian. Video reports showed troops getting unloaded along with armoured vehicles from military aircraft. Troops took over tasks of Kazakh security forces which included guarding governmental and military facilities (Kriener & Brassat 2023: 277).

Over four days, Russian Aerospace Force planes carried out more than 108 flights, and troops were deployed in Nur-Sultan and Almaty and its surroundings; command posts were set up in the Military Institute of Ground Troops in Almaty (Kremlin.ru 2022). Although numerous concessions were made to protesters and repression did not stop dissent, it was only after the CSTO was brought in that protests began to die out. Authorities justified their actions in combating a 'coup attempt' that was executed by organised criminal groups and 'gangster-led mobs' who were able to take the initiative and exploit what had originally started as a peaceful set of demonstrations on 5 January (Kumenov 2023). The result of CSTO troop intervention was immediate and blunt. On the night of 6 January, Kazakh security forces, supported by CSTO troops, began reclaiming government

administrative buildings that had been seized in Almaty and other urban areas. What's more, they regained control of Republic Square in Almaty where they were reported to have opened fire on protesters during the operation. Forces were shooting unarmed people and were even aiming at cars that were passing by. Upwards of 65 civilians were killed on 6 January. Buildings that were taken over across the Jambyl and Semey regions, in Aktobe airport, as well as the police station in Jambyl and the Nur Otan's ruling party office in Taraz were won back by state and CSTO forces. The quick victories experienced by activists were dealt away with in rapid fashion.

On 5 January, it appeared that the incumbent regime was holding on to its last grasp on power, yet by the end of the subsequent day, all key elements of success that the uprising had experienced up until that point in time were no longer in their control (Anisin 2024). On 10 January 2022, Vladimir Putin publicly addressed the situation and claimed that the CSTO would not permit any of its member states to be overthrown through 'color revolutions' which is a term used to frame externally backed or supported revolutionary campaigns and social movements in the post-Soviet space. He emphasised that the deployment of CSTO troops had been crucial in preventing armed groups from threatening the country's stability and territorial integrity (Reuters 2022). What's more, Putin aimed to send a signal that the CSTO would act and that any other possible revolutions would not be 'allowed' in former Soviet countries by the CSTO (Deutsche Welle 2022c). Also on 10 January 2022 in Moscow, CSTO leaders, including Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Akylbek Japarov, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon and Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization Stanislav Zas, held an extraordinary summit to discuss the situation in Kazakhstan and stressed the 'consensus based' nature of decision making to send in troops (Kremlin.ru 2022).

President Tokayev described the 'peacemaking potential' of the CSTO and its usage to ensure 'security, stability and integrity' of one of its member states. He concluded by stating, 'Overall, I would like to emphasise that the CSTO has shown its relevance and effectiveness as a high-profile military-political organisation, an operational mechanism to ensure the stability and security of our states' (Kremlin.ru 2022). Lukashenko likewise argued that the Kazakh case provided a 'lesson' for the CSTO and that the organisation needed to enhance its institutional capacities through strengthening and building up its capabilities, especially its peacekeeping potential. He importantly noted that 'a crackdown at the very outset yields tangible results' (Kremlin.ru 2022). Subsequently, Putin emphasised the threat of external forces to Kazakhstan's statehood and that activists relied on 'Maidan' technologies during protests.

He also pointed towards the legal legitimacy of the intervention by referencing Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty of 1992. Putin stated:

> Of course, we understand that the events in Kazakhstan are not the first and certainly not the last attempt to interfere in the domestic affairs of our states from outside. I agree with the President of Belarus on this. The measures taken by the CSTO clearly show that we will not allow anyone to stir up trouble at home and will not permit the realisation of another so-called colour revolution scenario. (Kremlin.ru 2022)

The deployment of troops to suppress mass protests in Kazakhstan demonstrates that the CSTO intervenes when a member state's security apparatus faces the risk of collapse or proves unreliable in defending the ruling government in relation to a politically and ideologically threatening group. To contrast these outcomes, we now turn to two cases of non-intervention which share similar dynamics, but also differ in key potentially causal features. In both Kyrgyz revolutions (2005 and 2020), large-scale protests fostered subsequent elite-led actions that arose as a response to disputed parliamentary elections and societal grievances against corruption. Although mobilisation was widespread and concluded in the ouster of incumbent leaders, political actors remained principally contained within the political elite cycle and the state apparatus endured. Security institutions (and forces) were temporarily overwhelmed, but did not disintegrate, then hastily realigned under new leadership. In contrast, the Kazakhstan 2022 case evolved into a large multi-city uprising that combined socioeconomic anger with violent assaults on security buildings and the seizure of airports and strategically important infrastructure. Police units collapsed, armouries were looted, and the government declared that terrorists were starting to overrun the state. The internal coercive structure itself became paralysed which threatened regime survival.

Counterfactual uprisings and framing of 'internal' political unrest

Kyrgyzstan experienced revolutions in 2005 and 2020. Both cases ousted sitting presidents (Askar Akayev and Sooronbay Jeenbekov), but did not bring about CSTO troop deployment or any form of collective enforcement action from the organisation. Even though these cases occurred fifteen years apart in what were truly different geopolitical contexts, they nevertheless share common features which include large-scale protests and security force defections. The Tulip case in March 2005 was driven by civilians' grievances against corruption and perceptions that parliamentary electoral cycles were being manipulated. Prior to the elections, a campaign had already formed (The People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan). Then incumbent, Akayev and his family and close allies were dominant in dictating economic and political outcomes throughout the country (Collins 2006; Radnitz

2010). In February 2005, parliamentary elections led to discontent and spurred various opposition groups to form into regional coalitions in both Jalal-Abad and Osh. Protests then spread from areas away from the capital, especially in the southern part of the country. Protesters were able to occupy different strategic hubs of the regime, including a regional administration building, a TV station and an administrative building (Khamidov 2006). Once dissent arose in the capital, activists successfully overtook and occupied government buildings. Police and local security forces were overwhelmed by demonstrators. The regime responded with repression in Jalal-Abad and Osh, but by 24 March, several youth groups organised thousands of people who gathered in the central square in Bishkek. Large protests formed seeking the incumbent's resignation. Interestingly enough, at this point in time, in the Russian Duma, Dmitry Rogozin and Vladimir Zhirinovsky proposed that CSTO peacekeeping troops be sent to Kyrgyzstan to deal with civil conflict in its southern region.

After violent interactions, protesters ended up overtaking the presidential palace in Bishkek. Akayev fled the country as widespread property destruction and looting occurred (Tudoroiu 2007: 333). State authority collapsed and the capital city experienced civil strife. Meanwhile, the CSTO remained passive. Indeed, the organisation was in its early years, as its secretariat was created only in 2004, and little is known about the state of development of its rapid-reaction capabilities at that period in time. For example, Weinstein had noted they existed only on paper (Weinstein 2007). What's more, even though Russia sustained a military base in Kant (near Bishkek), Moscow ended up not interfering. Interestingly enough, the fleeing of Akayev was perceived as an internal matter, and was thus not related to Article 4. Nor did the CSTO's collective council convene – there was no request for peacekeeping assistance. The political transition that followed this fast-paced governmental overturn saw a very limited role in terms of the CSTO. The subsequent government was led by Kurmanbek Bakiyev and restored order. At that time, there were fears of renewed violence, yet no multilateral peacekeeping mission was deployed. As Laruelle and Engvall (2015) explain, this early episode of revolutionary upheaval led to the CSTO interpreting such cases as domestic disruptions which are not directly applicable to its mandate unless the incumbent government frames them as foreign-instigated or terrorist in nature. While this framing strategy was indeed used in Kazakhstan in 2022, it is unlikely that it is what actually caused the CSTO to deploy troops.

To understand why this is so, we must look back at another uprising that arose in Kyrgyzstan fifteen years after its Tulip revolution. In October 2020, a rebellion occurred and was driven by very similar dynamics and antecedent factors. Although there are still differing narratives about the nature of this uprising (Doolotkeldieva 2021), it followed somewhat of a similar pattern as 2005 – parliamentary elections were disputed and large-scale protests arose in

Bishkek. A significant cleavage came to the surface between the northern parts of the country in relation to the south. Economic turmoil was also present as a result of dislocations induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and job loss was rampant, with unemployment spiralling up to 31% (Szukalski 2024: 275). Again, opposition groups seized the government headquarters – clashing with security forces in the process. This happened during the night of 5 October. Police responses to the demonstration were not enough even though heavy tear gassing and water cannons were directed towards protesters (Reuters 2020). The National Security Committee building was overrun (Al Jazeera 2020). Several political actors were freed from detention, including former President Almazbek Atambayev and politician Sadyr Japarov. At this point, although Jeenbekov declared a state of emergency and ordered troops into Bishkek (Dzyubenko 2020), this did not prevent dissent from dying down. Within several days, the incumbent leader resigned from his post. At the time, it was unclear as to whether the CSTO might intervene to restore order. Yet, just as in 2005, the organisation refrained from intervention. The acting prime minister, Japarov, did not formally request CSTO assistance, and Moscow quickly signalled its acceptance of the new authorities and described the situation as an internal affair (Buranelli 2022). This is a surprising position to take (retrospectively), as it appears that there was much more elite fragmentation after the 2020 events in comparison to 2005 (Sheranova & Uraimov 2023).

Thus, the CSTO's selective pattern of inaction exhibits how the organisation intervenes only when internal instability threatens regime survival and a given member state's monopoly over violence. When a member state's coercive apparatus becomes weakened to the point that the government cannot restore order through its own forces, this is when the organisation deploys troops. As noted above, in Kyrgyzstan's revolutions, incumbent rulers either stepped down or were ousted, but the state did not temporarily lose control of its security institutions. In 2005, Akayev fled and the successor government quickly consolidated authority; in 2020, although Jeenbekov's control evaporated, the army and interior troops did not defect to the side of protesters. In both cases, the coercive core of the state survived and reconstituted itself without prolonged civil conflict. Despite temporary confusion and protester seizures of government buildings, the armed forces and police remained fundamentally intact, and elite negotiations quickly restored political order.

Discussion

The sole intervention of the CSTO was an instance of regional regime stabilisation that can be assumed to be embedded in the post-Soviet architecture. In literature on regionalism and illiberal solidarity in Central Asia, multilateral institutions have been observed to serve to protect incumbents. In this sense, the CSTO's function during the Kazakh revolutionary uprising complements what Allison

(2013), Buranelli (2018; 2022), Ambrosio (2008, 2010) as well as Cooley (2012, 2015) have referred to as authoritarian regionalism. This functions as a form of security cooperation wherein formal multilateral mechanisms disguise and reinforce domestic regime durability through provision of mutual protection for autocratic elites. Allison (2013) demonstrated that post-Soviet regional organisations are likely to function as tools through which Russia and allied regimes manage internal instability. In some instances, this can empirically manifest under the guise of multilateralism. As revealed in the present study's assessment of the Kazakh CSTO intervention, Tokayev appealed to the CSTO and framed its necessary response in the backdrop of discourse of foreign-backed terrorism. What ended up unfolding empirically, however, was that the intervention reasserted state control over a mass revolutionary uprising that had mobilised against economic inequality and dysfunctional political institutions. Buranelli (2018) pointed out that when incumbent leaders engage in antagonising rhetoric on the topic of counterterrorism, it can play a legitimising role through which regional institutions efficiently justify coercive stabilisation. This likewise helps to offset political opposition to state-led crackdowns on activists and helps them to avoid stigma of repressive actions and responses. Another relevant dynamic to consider here pertains to what Ambrosio (2010) referred to as authoritarian diffusion in which the spread of nondemocratic governance practices through cooperative security mechanisms reduces the reputational and material costs of repression. This pertains to the underlying logic of the institutional design of regional bodies in Eurasia which some believe to be built on shared anxieties held by ruling elites about dealing with potential internal unrest. For example, Cooley (2012) argued that instead of pursuing collective defence against external enemies, the promotion of a sovereignty-protective model of regional order is favoured. Here, sovereignty gets reinterpreted as a metaphorical shield for illiberal governance. Such a form of regionalism embeds Russia's hierarchical role in the post-Soviet space. Similarly, As Cooley (2015) notes, Moscow's leadership in both the CSTO and the Eurasian Economic Union epitomises how regional integration has been repurposed to sustain a complex system of dependency (rather than organic symmetrical cooperation).

The sole CSTO intervention served both as a mechanism of domestic repression and as a performance of regional solidarity which, although rare, had an impact that ended up being effective. Indeed, in comparison to the many bouts of collective signalling that were identified in Nasibov's (2025) inquiry, the sole deployment of CSTO troops in 2022 is a much rarer phenomenon. Indeed, as Nasibov notes, the CSTO is a political tool that poses very subtle empirical functions – most of which manifest under domestic pressures. Importantly, however, we should concurrently not underestimate the organisation's hard power ability in being able to deploy troops when revolutionary upheavals pose

a threat to the institutional makeup of a given member state's polity. As such, we can observe that a key part of the organisation functions through a hierarchical intervention system in which Moscow plays the role of principal and smaller autocracies play the role of dependent agents. Investigating this organisation and its actions (or lack of actions) in future research can be done through capturing dynamics that are inherent to its principal-agent asymmetries. At this point in the organisation's history, intervention occurs when instability in a member state could jeopardise Russia's regional hegemony and bring a group to power that might capture a polity and put it at potential ideological or strategic odds with Moscow. Non-intervention, conversely, is likely when crises are seen as containable or not strategically vital.

Looking ahead, the CSTO makeup and its policies may change in terms of their geographical reach. Back in February 2022, Russia signed a Joint Declaration with China on the topic of preventing 'color' revolutions (Kim 2023), and this set of each country's foreign policy goals was articulated with relation to the expansion of NATO on one hand, and the role of the US in Taiwan on the other. Time will tell if a relatively clandestine aspect of the future of geopolitical struggles between Russia, the US and China will be marked by covert regime change-seeking operations. If this occurs, then global geopolitical struggles of the future may reflect a rebirth of earlier Cold War–derived logics wherein large powers support foreign regime change against incumbent governments they find adversarial (O'Rourke 2018).

Conclusion

In this study, a comparative inquiry into CSTO interventions and non-interventions has been carried out. Thus far, the CSTO has infrequently deployed troops into its member states in comparison to interventions and outcomes that arose during the Cold War under the previous security architecture of the USSR-led Warsaw Pact. By comparing different cases in which CSTO interventions could have occurred to the sole instance of the organisation's troop deployment, this study has revealed that a determining factor behind CSTO intervention is not political turnover but the continuity of coercive capacity and a member state's monopoly over violence. During protest and large-scale uprisings, where militaries and police remained intact, the CSTO abstained, but when they became fractured, intervention followed. Preventing the rise of hostile regimes in its member states appears to be a core function of the CSTO. The sole deployment of troops ended up significantly contributing to regime preservation. With these findings in mind, this study is not without shortcomings. The data that were relied on were mostly secondary sources and were absent of primary interview evidence potentially stemming from policymakers, diplomats (or even security officials) from CSTO member states. Since the organisation's decision-making

processes are impervious and its inner workings are seldom documented in public sources, such a limitation constrains this study's ability to reconstruct the direct strategic calculations that precede intervention or non-intervention. Another limitation is in some of the variables that were analysed in the comparative framework, as I was not able to capture all potential social and perceptual dimensions of regime security among elites, especially pertaining to informal expectations of reciprocal support by security forces.

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Correction

Correction to 'Local Content Curriculum Implementation in the Framework of Nationalism and National Security'

By Novie Indrawati Sagita, Nandang Alamsah Deliarnoor, Dian Afifah (published in vol. 13, no. 4, 2019).

In the above-mentioned article, the full name of the last-listed author should be stated as Dian Fitriani Afifah. Hence, the correct and complete list of authors is as follows:

Novie Indrawati Sagita, Nandang Alamsah Deliarnoor, Dian Fitriani Afifah

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We want to thank all the external reviewers who evaluated manuscripts in 2025. (Please note that the following list includes all the experts who sent their evaluations to CEJISS in 2025 regardless of when a reviewed manuscript was received and whether a given manuscript has or has not been published. We are particularly grateful to those who were willing to review more manuscripts.)

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