Adversarial conventional arms control in Europe: the quest for peace

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Summary

What explains the form that adversarial conventional arms control (CAC) agreements, which are agreements between geopolitically rival states, assume and what determines their success? CAC in Europe from the end of World War One to the present is the result of states attempting to stabilize the military balance, prevent surprise attacks, and remove potential sources of military dispute through the formal limitation of military capabilities. CAC can be based in part on a combination of states' considerations of deterrence, the security dilemma, and the offense-defense balance (ODB). When a post-conflict CAC agreement is imposed on a defeated state, the victors' considerations of deterrence and ODB take primacy, with the security dilemma being less relevant in the near term. However, for a peace-time CAC agreement including narrow cease-fires which establish a buffer zone, state parties must consider one another's' perceptions and requirements.

This dissertation's theoretical importance is its contribution to international security and conflict studies. CAC is presently an underdeveloped or underexplored theoretical topic. This dissertation contributes to theories concerning military balancing, power balancing, rivalry stabilization, conflict prevention, and war causation. Building up a unique dataset of approximately 25 CAC agreements, this dissertation offers original, empirical analyses based on comparative case analysis of these agreements and offers empirically-based findings and conclusions. This approach contrasts with most other CAC studies which attempt to offer broad insights and judgments of CAC, but do so based on narrow and incomplete datasets. Additionally, the dissertation attempts to identify theoretical frameworks to understand CAC that go beyond simple concepts of cooperation and competition.

This dissertation does not suggest that CAC will always be a component of these issues, but this dissertation has attempted to increase understanding of the impact of CAC's presence or absence on these theoretical areas. This dissertation is relevant to practitioners because the implications and lessons that this dissertation have identified are directly relevant to policymakers charged with crafting, negotiating, and implementing CAC agreements. This dissertation has attempted to offer the framework that CAC agreements might assume based on existing conditions, and that establishing agreements – which are by definition mutual – that vary from the historical precedents this dissertation discusses may be difficult. Moreover, this dissertation has offered various suggestions for what might make CAC agreements succeed – such as delegation to agreement implementers.

Part 1, chapters 1-3, offer an introduction to the topic of CAC, discuss the relevant theories and analytical framework, presents the literature review, and provides an overview of the methodologies used to answer the research question. Part 2, chapters 4-7, are composed of the research article chapters. This article-based dissertation (including four articles published in/submitted to peer-reviewed academic journals) seeks to answer the following overarching research question: *Under what conditions do the more powerful states in an adversarial CAC agreement accept a reduction in their relative military power?* Chapter 4 attempts to answer the research question by applying a typological methodology to categorize three conditions in which CAC agreements are made and when they retain or alter the status quo, defined by the military balance and, when applicable, broader national power balance. A model composed of three conditions attempts to explain and predict when the more powerful states will willingly accept a reduction in their relative national and military power, with the conditions being: perceptions of the current and future world order, pressures to significantly reduce or limit defense expenditures, and perceptions that the existing military balance is unstable. The model successfully explains and predicts most CAC agreement approaches to maintaining or altering the status quo, with the few exceptions being explained by the particularities of the geopolitics at the time and the agreement itself.

Chapters 5 and 6 seek to answer the question: How is adversarial CAC agreement success and failure defined?

Chapter 5 approaches this question as part of a broader question: *What is the effect of delegation to an agreement executor, such as an international organization, on the success of CAC in Europe and how is delegation to an agreement execution body defined and measured?* A sum score methodology measures state delegation of authority to agreement implementers and agreement success is scored to enable a correlational analysis. The cross-case study suggests that delegation is slightly correlated with agreement success, and that the involvement of a third-party state has a high correlation with success. This study also observed that delegation to agreement executors has slightly increased over time.

In chapter 6, a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method assessed four conditions: delegation, national limitations, geographic demilitarization, and great power rivalry with CAC agreement success as an outcome to answer the question: *Under what conditions are adversarial conventional arms control agreements (CAC) in Europe successful or unsuccessful?* This study's results suggest that national limitations between great power rivals and the absence of delegation with great power rivalry are more likely to result in

agreement failure. Delegation may be important for agreement success when great powers or buffer zones are involved.

In order to answer the question: *What role did conventional arms control (CAC) agreements failures play in Russia's decision to invade Ukraine?* chapter 7 uses a within-case study with process tracing and counterfactual analysis of Russian President Putin's decision to invade Ukraine in February 2022 and hypothesizes that one of the main causes of the invasion was the deterioration of CAC in Europe. This analysis of Russia's CAC agreement perception and policies from the Cold War's end to the 2022 Ukraine invasion demonstrated that Russia sought to address what they viewed as relatively increasing and threatening NATO military capability, in part due to membership expansion, through CAC. Russia attempted to adjust and update the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, as well as create new agreements. When it became apparent that the US and NATO would not concede to the CAC controls or agreements demanded by Moscow, President Putin decided to invade Ukraine. This case suggests that the goal of obtaining a CAC agreement is in part the product of dissatisfaction with the status quo, or a desire to lock in the status quo when one party sees that the other is obtaining comparative advantages.

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation, emphasizing the importance and relevance of CAC.

Overall, this thesis is more positive than negative about CAC agreements for several reasons. First, this thesis attempts to demonstrate and emphasize that the success record for CAC agreements is not one of unequivocal failure. Indeed, about half of the 37 CAC agreements since 1918 can be considered successful, with one-third of the 37 agreements still in effect – which may not be a poor record given the changes that have swept Europe since the Great War ended. Moreover, many of the agreements were overcome by positive political changes rather than having collapsed due to rivalry or conflict, leaving just one-third as complete failures. The successful cases suggest that CAC can contribute to establishing peace or at least creating conditions for a stable relationship between rivals through decreasing sources of dispute; and that CAC overall is at least partially successful. Today, twelve agreements are still in effect – again emphasizing that pessimistic views of CAC are misplaced. And, despite concerns about Russia's compliance with CAC agreements especially in light of their invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia is a party to at least seven of the agreements still in force.

CAC is arguably also relevant to a post-Russo-Ukraine War Europe. A well-crafted CAC agreement implemented by state parties committed to its success may very well stabilize

and contribute to ending the NATO-Russia rivalry. Failure to establish an effective CAC agreement that addresses underlying tensions in the NATO-Russian rivalry could leave the door open to future conflict – a tragedy that should be avoided if possible.