Regulating Entangling Alliances:

Explaining the Rise of Rules-Based Military Cooperation, 1816-2012

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Abstract

When does it advance the national security interests of rival states to submit their military power to the oversight of common rules? In this paper, I synthesize regime theory, historical security materialism, and network analysis to develop a new answer to this fundamental question. I argue that reduction of the systemic risk of military alliances — a new concept that I introduce and operationalize — has been a core rationale for rules-based military cooperation in the age of industrial modernity, especially from the nineteenth and into the twenty-first centuries. During that time, the institutional design of rules-based military cooperation repeatedly alternated between four institutional forms: permanent neutralizations, multilateral guarantees, collective security, and collective defence. On the proposed model, these shifts can be conjecturally explained in terms of longitudinal variation in the ability of these institutional forms to impede the propagation of systemic risk. I use mathematical modelling of risk propagation on networks, combining the ATOP data with the non-linear DebtRank algorithm, to test this conjecture. The result is a marked improvement in our explanatory leverage: with only one explanatory variable, the proposed model is shown to fully account for the evolution of rules-based military cooperation across the past two centuries.