

# NATO Consensus as Ceremony

## How the Coordination Architecture Fragments While Functioning

Martin Sauer

---

This analysis applies the Narrative Power proof (NP) to diagnose the structural condition of NATO's coordination architecture across seven dimensions, three narrative instances, and the scientific canon of the social sciences.

© April 2026 DURCHD8. All rights reserved.

## **Disclaimer**

This analysis diagnoses the structural condition of a coordination architecture. It does not evaluate normative claims, propose interventions, or declare systems “will collapse” without specified triggering conditions. The analysis is forensic, neutral, and non-normative. It identifies channel degradation under continued output production—a condition distinct from both systemic health and systemic failure.

## **Copyright Notice**

© 2026 Martin Sauer / DURCHD8. All rights reserved. Reproduction, distribution, or other use requires prior written consent.

System: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation—Coordination Architecture Current State  
Period: Window 4 (2022–2026), anchored at Hague Summit (June 2025) and NDS 2026 (January 2026)  
Analyst: DURCHD8 / NP proof / April 2026  
Classification: DURCHD8-NATO-2026-001

# PREFACE

## REASONING

Many analyses of NATO produce different results from different perspectives, each with its own policy implications. The fragmentation obscures both the alliance's architectural complexity and the specificity of its current condition. The alliance's dependencies differ in kind: internal stress from divergent member-state postures (from US strategic reorientation through Nordic total-defence mobilisation, Turkish autonomous positioning, and Spanish base denial to Italian crisis hedging); external pressure from Russian and Chinese information operations and hybrid activities on NATO members; and continuous conflict pressure from the Ukraine war, joined since March 2026 by the Iran confrontation. All three are flattened by perspective-specific framing, and central factors receive insufficient weight.

The published NP proof allows complete multidimensional examination of the alliance under these pressures, with time as a constraint. Many findings are not new. What is new is the architectural grounding – why the vulnerabilities appear where they do. This is precise cause identification – in context, under mutual dependency, under constraints – directly translatable into policy. Annex 1 documents seven findings whose formulation requires specific NP elements. Whether alternative architectures can reproduce them is an open question the analysis invites.

## METHODICS

The analysis applies the preprint NP proof together with a broad set of canonical models from the social sciences – across International Relations, organisational sociology, institutional theory, strategic studies, decision theory, and political philosophy. The joint application of this range to a single empirical case becomes possible through NP's decomposition of the coordination architecture into seven dimensions. Each theory performs specific mechanistic work on the dimension(s) it addresses, and NP's referential dependence (D.3.2) integrates them into a single architectural diagnosis.



## RESULT

The result of this methodological approach is clarity under uncertainty: recognition of what is structurally important, what holds under pressure, and what decisions remain to be taken.

*Reading paths.* For the risk assessment and forward projections: B and D (8 pages). For the dimensional evidence: C.1–C.4 (18 pages). For the architectural diagnosis and structural tests: C.5–C.15, then F. For reference data: E (exhibits, self-contained).

*Companion documents.* A *Strategic Assessment* (16 pp.) develops the analytical argument with selected evidence for readers who require the structural diagnosis without the full evidentiary apparatus. A *Briefing Note* (3 pp.) condenses the core findings for decision-makers and senior staff. Both are derived from this analysis and available separately.

## ABSTRACT

NATO's coordination architecture as of April 2026 is populated on all seven dimensions and persistently incoherent on each of them, partially buffered by managed decoupling and institutional redundancy. The iteration windows available for producing coherence are systematically shorter than the tempo at which coordination pressure arrives — dimensional stress accumulates rather than resolving. Purpose is the most contested dimension, Values the most decoupled.

Seven findings follow from the NP derivation:

1. **Three-layer configuration conflict:** the declared order, the operative order, and the sedimented expectation order diverge as a configuration conflict with different adaptation tempi.
2. **Dispositif paradox:** the institutional machinery that makes the architecture durable is architecturally the same mechanism that prevents adaptation.
3. **T4 asymmetry (preliminary — constrained by scope):** Russia's structural advantage lies in referential completeness rather than material power — a coherence category independent of capability count.
4. **Normative cascade:** Purpose fragmentation transmits structurally through Values to Legitimacy — enabled by referential dependence (D.3.2), activated by current stress concentration.
5. **Multi-speed security community:** mature Nordic-Baltic core, stressed transatlantic centre, transactional periphery — dimensional configurations, not political labels.
6. **Time-compression meta-constraint:** iteration windows shorter than coordination pressure tempo convert dimensional stress into accumulating control loss; forced decisions reinforce incoherence rather than resolving it.
7. **Sender-amplification mechanism:** in affectively fragmented meaning spaces where institutional trust is low, official corrective intervention amplifies rather than neutralises adversary effect — a structural consequence of the unoccupied H2-spine and dimensional vacancy on Values and Legitimacy.

Each finding is derived in the course of the analysis and documented in Annex 1 with the specific NP elements its formulation requires. Each identifies the architectural location at which intervention would be effective.



# CONTENTS

<b>Preface</b> .....	1
Reasoning.....	1
Methodics.....	1
Result.....	2
<b>Abstract</b> .....	3
<b>A</b> <b>Executive Frame</b> .....	1
A.1    Scope .....	1
A.2    Method.....	1
A.3    Limits .....	2
<b>B</b> <b>Operational Risk Statement: Consequences of Misclassification</b> .....	4
B.1    Material Misdiagnosis .....	4
B.2    Assumed Coherence.....	5
B.3    Unrecognised Legitimacy Shift.....	6
B.4    Persistence Mistaken for Health.....	6
B.5    Carrying Capacity Exceeded Without Warning .....	7
<b>C</b> <b>Forensic Core</b> .....	9
C.1    Structural Architecture: R1-R4 Applied to NATO .....	9
C.1.1   Block-Level Test Results.....	9
C.1.2   Adversary Coherence Asymmetry: Imposed versus Generated.....	10
C.1.3   Instance 3: Toward a Three-Level Assessment.....	10
C.1.4   Seven Findings in Brief.....	12
C.2    Iteration Dynamics under Time Compression.....	13
C.3    The Three-Layer Configuration Conflict.....	15
C.4    Per-Dimension Diagnosis.....	16
C.4.1   Identity — Who? .....	16
C.4.2   Relationship — To whom?.....	17
C.4.3   Competence — With what capacity?.....	20
C.4.4   Values — By what standard?.....	21
C.4.5   Resources — Over what?.....	23
C.4.6   Purpose — What for? .....	24



C.4.7	Legitimacy – By what right? .....	25
C.5	Block Mechanisms .....	27
C.6	Operative Coherence: What the Architecture Delivers .....	29
C.7	Core Task Output Test .....	30
C.8	The Dispositif Paradox as Block-Level Diagnosis .....	33
C.9	The Coupling Map: How Dimensional Failures Transmit .....	34
C.10	The Greenland Precedent as Structural Test .....	35
C.11	The Adversary Coherence Asymmetry .....	36
C.12	The Habermasian Contradiction as Structural Condition .....	37
C.13	The Two-Vector External Contestation .....	38
C.14	Cognitive-Narrative Structural Deficit .....	40
C.15	Cross-Dimensional Dependencies (D.3.2) .....	42
<b>D</b>	<b>Decision Architecture</b> .....	44
<b>E</b>	<b>Exhibits</b> .....	47
E.1	Three-Layer Configuration Conflict .....	47
E.2	Dimensional Risk Hierarchy .....	47
E.3	Transmission Pathways .....	48
E.4	Security Community Phase Map .....	48
E.5	Olson/Zeckhauser Inversion .....	49
E.6	Institutional Logic Shift (Summit Declarations) .....	49
E.7	US Troop Deployment in Europe (Longitudinal) .....	49
E.8	Historical Carrying-Capacity Stress Tests .....	50
E.9	Iteration-Window Proxy: Alliance Response Tempo versus Adversary Action Tempo .....	51
<b>F</b>	<b>Closing Diagnosis</b> .....	52
<b>Annex 1</b>	<b>Seven Findings Requiring the NP Derivation</b> .....	54
<b>Annex 2</b>	<b>Scope Limitations</b> .....	57



## A EXECUTIVE FRAME

### A.1 SCOPE

This analysis is a forensic structural diagnosis. Its scope is the coordination architecture's current condition under identified stress, diagnosed through the NP proof and the scientific canon.

The object is NATO's coordination architecture as of 8 April 2026 — the seven-dimensional structure through which the alliance generates durable coordinated power. The analysis covers the window 2022–2026, anchored by three structural inflection points: the Hague Summit commitment to 5% GDP defence spending (June 2025), the US National Defense Strategy reclassifying Europe as reduced-priority theatre — the NDS does not use the term explicitly but its priority ordering (Defend Homeland, Deter China, regional allies assume primary responsibility) produces the characterisation — (January 2026),<sup>1</sup> and the Iran confrontation that tested out-of-area coordination without NAC activation (March–April 2026). Each inflection point marks a shift in dimensional loading; together they define the stress window under which the seven findings were generated.

Three narrative instances are assessed in parallel:

- **Instance 1** — NATO Collective Defence Narrative (SC 2022,<sup>2</sup> Hague Summit Declaration<sup>3</sup>)
- **Instance 2** — US “America First” Counter-Narrative (NSS 2025,<sup>4</sup> NDS 2026,<sup>5</sup> “paper tiger” April 2026<sup>6</sup>)
- **Instance 3** — Russian “Civilisational Struggle” Narrative (Putin Valdai 2024,<sup>7</sup> Lavrov MID 2025–2026<sup>8,9</sup>)

### A.2 METHOD

**Applicability check.** The NP derivation applies where its three starting conditions obtain (Proposition 0).<sup>10</sup> For NATO: C1 (Plurality) — 32 sovereign member states. C2 (Interdependence) — treaty-based mutual defence obligations (Article 5), integrated military command

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of War, “2026 National Defense Strategy,” 23 January 2026, 8, 14.

<sup>2</sup> NATO, “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept” (Madrid, 29 June 2022).

<sup>3</sup> NATO, “The Hague Summit Declaration,” 25 June 2025.

<sup>4</sup> The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2025).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of War, “2026 National Defense Strategy,” 23 January 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Trump, interview with The Telegraph, 1 April 2026.

<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Putin, address at Valdai International Discussion Club, 2024, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75521>.

<sup>8</sup> Sergei Lavrov, Federation Council “Government Hour,” 10 December 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Sergei Lavrov, Ambassadorial Roundtable, 5 March 2026.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Sauer, “Narrative Power: How Does Durable Coordinated Power Emerge?” (Preprint, 23 February 2026), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18745256>.

(SACEUR/SHAPE), shared infrastructure (AWACS, NDPP, STANAGs), and continuous political consultation (NAC). C3 (Processing) — each member government interprets, evaluates, and anticipates signals; the alliance’s institutional apparatus (intelligence sharing, threat assessments, summit cycles) is itself a C3-processing structure. All three conditions obtain. The derivation applies.

For each dimension, the relevant theories from the scientific canon are applied as mechanistic instruments, not cited decoratively. Two theory classes are distinguished: **Class 1 (Mechanics)** — non-normative theories describing how a dimension operates; **Class 2 (Sedimented Instantiations)** — normative theories that are themselves dimensional fillings, constituting the operative order they regulate.

The analysis explicitly calibrates dimensional incoherence against operational coherence (C.6) to control for the observation asymmetry that incoherence generates documents while quiet alignment does not.

For alliance analysis specifically: hierarchy, asymmetric role distribution, selective decoupling, and unilateral clustering can be stable operative fillings of a coordination architecture. These features are assessed as potential erosion indicators only after determining which frictions are constitutively normal for the object under examination. NP describes the constitutive architecture, not the historical standard form of the object.

Structural realism, liberal institutionalism, and bureaucratic-politics approaches each explain observable alliance phenomena through their respective mechanisms. NP does not claim to supersede these frameworks; it claims architectural integration — the capacity to locate each framework at its dimensional address and to generate findings that emerge from the interaction between dimensions, which no single-framework analysis produces in isolation. The simultaneous application of approximately sixty canonical theories across seven dimensions and three levels of abstraction produced no internal contradiction within this analysis — a result that was not guaranteed by the derivation and that replication on other empirical cases can test. Where the dimensional findings can be replicated through alternative theoretical architectures, such replication strengthens rather than threatens the structural diagnosis. The analysis invites cross-verification.

### A.3 LIMITS

Open-source evidence throughout; classified assessments referenced where publicly reported.<sup>11,12</sup> Confidence levels flagged inline where below High. No policy prescriptions — only condition-consequence statements derived from identified mechanisms. Condition-consequence statements identify structural consequences of identifiable conditions. Where the condition is a policy variable, the consequence statement carries policy-adjacent implications without constituting a prescription. The analysis identifies the mechanism; the decision whether and how to intervene remains with the responsible authority.

Three forms of decoupling are distinguished throughout the analysis:

<sup>11</sup> Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), assessment of Russian military spending, 2024: EUR 202bn, approximately 66% above official figures. Reported via The Straits Times, 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Danish Defence Intelligence Service (DDIS), Intelligence Risk Assessment 2025 (Copenhagen: DDIS, 2025).



**Functional decoupling** — load-bearing buffer mechanisms that absorb operative dissonance and lower transaction costs in multilateral institutions.

**Erosive decoupling** — divergence that hollows the carrying expectation order without triggering immediate institutional failure.

**Collapse-threshold claims** — assertions of impending institutional failure, which require direct evidence of attack on the core order and are used only with explicit confidence qualifiers.

## B OPERATIONAL RISK STATEMENT: CONSEQUENCES OF MISCLASSIFICATION

The dimensional diagnosis produces a specific testable claim: that NATO's structural condition is systematically misclassified by frameworks that assess individual dimensions in isolation. The five risk statements that follow name the classification errors and trace their operative consequences — each identifies a point where the standard assessment diverges from the architectural diagnosis.

Five misclassification risks follow — each with its risk vector, mechanism of failure, and non-obvious conclusion. Decision-space impact and second-order effects are named where they carry distinct analytical weight.

### B.1 MATERIAL MISDIAGNOSIS

**Risk Vector:** NATO's condition is classified as a material capability problem solvable through increased defence spending.

**Mechanism of Failure:** The NDS 2026 frames the resource equation as already favourable — “\$26 trillion vs. \$2 trillion.”<sup>13</sup> European defence investment reached USD 563bn in 2025.<sup>14,15</sup> Yet if the diagnosis stops at material inputs, the architectural dysfunction remains unaddressed: five divergent purpose definitions,<sup>16</sup> a values standard decoupled from declared content,<sup>17</sup> and a decision architecture operating at institutional tempo (years) against adversarial tempo (weeks).<sup>18</sup> R1 (Functional Autonomy) establishes that the coordination architecture operates beyond its material substrate<sup>19</sup> — and the “\$26T vs \$2T” formulation commits precisely the error R1 prevents.

**Decision-Space Impact:** Resource allocation increases without capability conversion. Spending-to-capability conversion fails at three structural chokepoints: personnel, ammunition production, procurement efficiency.<sup>20</sup> The alliance becomes materially richer and coordinatively poorer.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of War, “2026 National Defense Strategy,” 23 January 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

<sup>14</sup> NATO, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014--2025),” 17 June 2025.

<sup>15</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2026* (London: Routledge, 2026).

<sup>16</sup> Colin S. Gray, “Strategic Culture as Context,” *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 49--69.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia H. Thornton, William Ocasio, and Michael Lounsbury, *The Institutional Logics Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> NATO Allied Command Transformation, “Cognitive Warfare Concept,” MC-endorsed November 2025; NATO StratCom COE, Riga.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Sauer, “Narrative Power: How Does Durable Coordinated Power Emerge?” (Preprint, 23 February 2026), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18745256>.

<sup>20</sup> NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, capability gap statements, press conferences following NATO Defence Ministerial (June 2025) and NATO Summit preparation (September 2025).



**Second-Order Effect:** Increased spending on US platforms (F-35) reproduces the hierarchy Lake's framework identifies;<sup>21</sup> US arms exports to Europe rose 217% post-2022,<sup>22</sup> reinforcing material lock-in.

**Non-Obvious Conclusion:** The primary risk is architectural incoherence — the inability to coordinate what is possessed — rather than material insufficiency.

## B.2 ASSUMED COHERENCE

**Risk Vector:** NATO's formal consensus and summit declarations are treated as evidence of political coherence.

**Mechanism of Failure:** Meyer and Rowan's institutional analysis demonstrates that formal structures function as legitimacy facades while operative practice diverges.<sup>23</sup> The Hague Declaration reaffirms unity;<sup>24</sup> operatively, sixteen documented dissent incidents cluster on Purpose and Resources.<sup>25</sup> The consensus principle approaches ceremonial function. In asymmetric alliances, this ceremony can function as load-bearing decoupling — it absorbs operative dissonance without forcing every disagreement to the political surface. The diagnostic question is whether the ceremony still carries structural weight or has become erosive: reproducing the appearance of alignment while the operative divergence deepens beneath it.

**Decision-Space Impact:** Adversaries calibrate against operative coherence, not declared coherence. The April 2026 Iran crisis confirmed the pattern: allies did not refuse the alliance but avoided turning the crisis into an alliance question, coordinating instead through national capitals, the E3, and ad hoc maritime formats while no public Article 4 or Article 5 mechanism was activated.<sup>26</sup>

**Non-Obvious Conclusion:** The more elaborate the ceremonial consensus, the wider the gap it may be compensating.

<sup>21</sup> David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> SIPRI, Arms Transfers Database, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

<sup>23</sup> John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations," *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 2 (1977): 340–363.

<sup>24</sup> NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," 25 June 2025.

<sup>25</sup> Sixteen documented dissent, opt-out, and blockade incidents across the 2022–2026 window, compiled from official NATO communiqués, member-state government statements, and verified press reporting. Full documentation in the forensic analysis, chapter C.4–C.5.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Rutte, "No talk of triggering NATO's Article 5 over Turkey missile shoot-down," 5 March 2026 (*Economic Times*). Bundesregierung, "Aussprache zur Lage im Iran," Bundestag, 4 March 2026 ([bundestag.de](https://www.bundestag.de)). Ministero degli Affari Esteri (MAECI), Gulf Task Force coordination, March 2026 ([esteri.it](https://www.esteri.it)). Spain: Robles, JFC Naples, 26 March 2026 ([defensa.gob.es](https://www.defensa.gob.es)).



### B.3 UNRECOGNISED LEGITIMACY SHIFT

**Risk Vector:** NATO's legitimacy is assumed stable because pragmatic delivery (no attack on member territory) continues.

**Mechanism of Failure:** Suchman's three-mode analysis reveals a structural shift from moral-cognitive legitimacy (durable, standing-order) to pragmatic-transactional legitimacy (fragile, requiring continuous benefit delivery).<sup>27</sup> In the United States, fewer than half of Gen Z respondents (47%) say NATO makes the country safer, though 79% still support maintaining or increasing the US commitment — declining perceived utility rather than wholesale rejection.<sup>28</sup> European youth data is more differentiated: Eurobarometer records 81% EU-wide support for common defence policy with youth trust in the EU at 59% among 15–24 year-olds (11 points above 55+);<sup>29</sup> in frontline states such as Latvia, youth NATO support reaches 93%.<sup>30</sup> The generational pattern is differentiated security socialisation rather than uniform erosion — utility-scepticism in low-threat environments, sustained commitment where threat proximity is high. Geographic erosion (Turkey 30%, Greece 28%) and partisan erosion (US: Democrats 77%, Republicans 45%; Republicans under 50: 38% vs. over 50: 63% on global engagement) fragment the cognitive base.<sup>31</sup>

**Non-Obvious Conclusion:** Pragmatic legitimacy alone cannot sustain institutional identity across generations. The “legitimacy trap” — substituting spending metrics for democratic standards — erodes the normative base on which cognitive taken-for-grantedness rests.

### B.4 PERSISTENCE MISTAKEN FOR HEALTH

**Risk Vector:** NATO's continued institutional functioning is treated as evidence that the architecture is sound.

**Mechanism of Failure:** The Foucauldian *dispositif* — the technical apparatus through which institutional power operates — here instantiated as STANAGs, NDPP, and socialisation routines, reproduces institutional coherence independently of political alignment.<sup>32,33</sup> Forces interoperate, standards apply, exercises execute — while Purpose, Values, Identity, and Legitimacy fragment. The institutional machinery's autopilot function masks the political erosion.

The persistence carries a second, less visible function: approximately 100,000 US troops deployed in Europe (D.7) constitute a physical tripwire whose deterrence value operates independently of presidential rhetoric.<sup>34</sup> Even where political commitment erodes, the bureaucratic

<sup>27</sup> Mark C. Suchman, “Managing Legitimacy,” *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 571–610.

<sup>28</sup> Chicago Council on Global Affairs, “Young Americans Support NATO but Unsure It Makes United States Safer,” 9 July 2024.

<sup>29</sup> European External Action Service, “EU survey record high trust in the EU and strong support for common defence,” 29 May 2025.

<sup>30</sup> GLOBSEC, Trends 2022: Latvia (ages 18–24). Defense Paradox data from GLOBSEC, Trends 2025: 78% would defend allies (Art.5) vs. 68% would defend own country.

<sup>31</sup> Pew Research Center, “NATO Viewed Favorably Across 13 Member Nations,” 23 June 2025. Pew Research Center, “Younger Americans Are Less Likely Than Others to Support an Active Role for the U.S. in World Affairs,” 22 December 2025 (partisan-age intersection data).

<sup>32</sup> Lynne G. Zucker, “The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence,” *American Sociological Review* 42, no. 5 (1977): 726–743.

<sup>33</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

<sup>34</sup> Congressional Research Service, “U.S. Military Presence in Europe: Issues for Congress,” updated March 2026. Troop data: 305,000 (1991), 64,000 (2020 nadir), approximately 100,000 (2022–2024 post-invasion surge).

and material entanglement generates what Schelling termed “the threat that leaves something to chance” — the adversary cannot reliably calculate whether US military-bureaucratic chains of command would remain passive if those troops took casualties.<sup>35</sup> The dispositif thus produces residual deterrence through physical entanglement rather than through credible political commitment. But tripwire deterrence is as durable as the troop presence that generates it — and troop levels are a presidential decision. The 2020 nadir (64,000) demonstrates that the tripwire can be thinned by the same political authority whose rhetoric it is designed to compensate.

| *The durability mechanism is simultaneously the vulnerability mechanism.*

**Non-Obvious Conclusion:** NATO survives through inertia — inertia sustains without adapting. The institutional persistence generates residual deterrence through physical entanglement — a tripwire that deters even when the political signal does not. That tripwire is real but contingent: it depends on continued troop presence, which depends on the political will it substitutes for.

## B.5 CARRYING CAPACITY EXCEEDED WITHOUT WARNING

**Risk Vector:** The managed decoupling between declared and operative order is assumed indefinitely sustainable.

**Mechanism of Failure:** Functional decoupling absorbs the gap between declared unity and operative fragmentation. But each new stress adds load: Greenland (ally-on-ally coercion),<sup>36</sup> Slovakia (systematic withdrawal from Ukraine architecture),<sup>37</sup> NDS 2026 conditionality,<sup>38</sup> Trump’s “paper tiger” direct institutional delegitimisation (1 April 2026).<sup>39</sup>

Historical comparison calibrates the threshold. The Suez Crisis (1956) was absorbed through institutional repair (Three Wise Men report);<sup>40</sup> the Iraq split (2003) was absorbed through compartmentalisation, with the Defence Planning Committee bypassing the NAC deadlock to authorise defensive assistance to Turkey under Article 4.<sup>41</sup> Both cases succeeded because the crisis could be separated from NATO’s core territorial-defence identity, a minimal defensive obligation could be fulfilled, and the conflict did not force allies to decide whether members remained inside the circle of dependable peaceful change.<sup>42</sup> The DPC was dissolved in 2010 following France’s reintegration into the integrated military command structure. The institutional bypass mechanism that preserved the alliance during the deepest political split of the post-Cold War era no longer exists.

The comparative evidence suggests, though does not directly measure, that institutional stress does not fully reset between episodes but may accumulate, altering the structural conditions

<sup>35</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 89–125.

<sup>36</sup> North Atlantic Council, statement on Greenland sovereignty, January 2026; European allies warned that use of force against a member’s territory would constitute an Article 1 violation. Reported in Reuters, 22 January 2026; Politico Europe, 23 January 2026.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. State Department, “Secretary Rubio and Slovak PM Fico Joint Press Availability,” 23 October 2025; Hungary-Slovakia blockade of 20th EU sanctions package, February 2026 (Reuters, 24 February 2026).

<sup>38</sup> Elbridge Colby, “NATO Ministerial Remarks,” February 2026.

<sup>39</sup> Donald Trump, interview with *The Telegraph*, 1 April 2026.

<sup>40</sup> NATO, “Report of the Committee of Three” (Three Wise Men, 1956).

<sup>41</sup> NATO, “Decision Sheet of the Defence Planning Committee,” 16 February 2003. DPC dissolved 2010.

<sup>42</sup> NATO, “Committee of Three” (1956); NATO, “DPC Decision Sheet,” 16 February 2003.

under which subsequent crises are processed. Vaughan's analysis of the Challenger decision specifies the temporal mechanism: normalisation of deviance operates through accumulation, where each accepted departure from expected standards becomes the new baseline against which the next departure is judged.<sup>43</sup> Read through the iteration-dynamics frame (C.2), the carrying-capacity question is primarily a time-coherence-mismatch problem rather than a decoupling-capacity problem: the iteration window for producing coherence around each new stress is progressively shorter than the stress-injection rate, and each forced decision at compressed coherence deepens the deviation that the next decision will have to normalise. [Confidence: Medium-High – structural mechanism grounded in Meyer/Rowan + Vaughan; threshold proximity inferred from comparative analysis of three stress tests (Suez, Iraq 2003, Greenland); the accumulation hypothesis is structurally plausible but empirically untested as a general proposition.]

**Non-Obvious Conclusion:** The system provides no early warning of threshold proximity. The next Article 5 invocation, extended deterrence crisis, or ally-on-ally territorial escalation will test whether the declared order can bear operative load – without the bypass valve that absorbed the last comparable split.

---

<sup>43</sup> Diane Vaughan, *The Challenger Launch Decision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

## C FORENSIC CORE

### C.1 STRUCTURAL ARCHITECTURE: R1–R4 APPLIED TO NATO

#### C.1.1 Block-Level Test Results

The NP derivation produces four testable structural results. Applied to NATO, they answer a single question: does the coordination architecture function as an integrated whole, or does it fragment under dimensional stress? The tests establish that the architecture is functionally autonomous from material capability (R1), that its erosion destabilises predictably (R2), that coherence is violated on every dimension (R3), and that the adversary holds a structural completeness advantage (R4). Four structural results tested at the block level:

**R1 (Functional Autonomy):** NATO's coordination architecture operates as a functionally autonomous domain beyond material capability.

*EUR 563bn in European spending without shared purpose, coherent decision architecture, or cross-domain synchronisation produces material surplus and coordinative deficit.*

<sup>44,45</sup> R1 obtains.

**R2 (Critical Infrastructure):** Where the architecture erodes — Hungary/Slovakia (near-complete cognitive legitimacy erosion), <sup>46,47</sup> transatlantic relationship (exhibiting stress indicators within sustained institutional density on the sociological axis)<sup>48,49</sup> — the dimensional block destabilises on every axis the derivation predicts. R2 obtains.

**R3 (Multimodal Synchronisation):** Coherence is violated on every dimension. The most severe violations: Values (declared liberal-democratic versus operative market-transactional)<sup>50</sup> and Purpose (SC 2022 versus NDS 2026).<sup>51,52</sup> R3 obtains — and identifies **persistent multimodal incoherence, unevenly distributed across all seven dimensions**, as the dominant structural vulnerability.

<sup>44</sup> NATO, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2025)," 17 June 2025; NATO, "Defence Expenditures and NATO's 5% Commitment," 18 December 2025; IISS, *The Military Balance* 2026.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Sauer, "Narrative Power: How Does Durable Coordinated Power Emerge?" (Preprint, 23 February 2026), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18745256>. C1–C3; Lemma; Bottleneck Theorem; R1–R4; T1–T4; D.3.2 Referential Dependence; H.4 Decoupling.

<sup>46</sup> Hungarian Government, public opposition to Ukraine NATO accession, June 2025. Official government portal.

<sup>47</sup> Slovakia deepened dissent, October 2025–February 2026. U.S. State Department, "Secretary Rubio and Slovak PM Fico Joint Press Availability," 13 February 2026.

<sup>48</sup> Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

<sup>49</sup> Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> Patricia H. Thornton, William Ocasio, and Michael Lounsbury, *The Institutional Logics Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> NATO, "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept" (Madrid, 29 June 2022).

<sup>52</sup> U.S. Department of War (formerly Department of Defense; secondary title "Department of War" restored September 2025 under the second Trump administration), "2026 National Defense Strategy," 23 January 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.



**R4 (Dimensional Advantage):** NATO's block is populated but incomplete on Purpose and incoherent on Values.

### C.1.2 Adversary Coherence Asymmetry: Imposed versus Generated

Instance 3 (Russia) maintains referential coherence across all seven dimensions *at the declared-operative level* — a singular identity, explicit purpose, internally consistent values, mobilised resources, whole-of-government competence, self-generated legitimacy.<sup>53,54</sup>

This coherence is imposed, not generated. Centralised authoritarian enforcement suppresses the three-layer test: operative practice is forced to match declared content through repression, not through the institutional convergence that produces durable coordination under NP.

Imposed coherence constitutes a distinct durability mode — fragile to leadership succession, internal dissent, or C3-disruption (as the Wagner mutiny of June 2023 demonstrated at the Competence-Legitimacy nexus).

Completeness in the NP sense generates a structural advantage with respect to the durability condition; it says nothing about adaptation quality, feedback capacity, or robustness under repression costs. The imposed-versus-generated distinction is a fixed qualification: NATO must generate referential coherence through alignment; Russia enforces it by design. The durability modes differ, and so do their fragility profiles.

The imposed-coherence claim is substantiated below through a partial three-level assessment constrained by scope (Scope Limitation 6). R4 obtains with the qualifications that follow.

### C.1.3 Instance 3: Toward a Three-Level Assessment

**Declared level.** Documented above: Putin's Valdai 2024 address positions Russia as a civilisational state in existential confrontation with Western liberalism; Lavrov's MID statements (2025–2026) operationalise this as explicit multipolarity doctrine.<sup>55,56</sup> The declared filling is referentially complete at the textual level: singular identity (civilisational state), explicit purpose (multipolarity), internally consistent values (sovereignty, tradition, Orthodox continuity), mobilised resources (10% GDP combined defence/security), whole-of-government competence, and self-generated legitimacy (historical mandate).

**Operative level.** Three independent forensic analyses converge on the governance mechanism through which this declared coherence is maintained operatively.

*Governance without command.* Russian information-domain governance operates as a permanent institutional function anchored in Presidential Decree No. 646 (2016), Federal Laws 149-FZ, 90-FZ (sovereign internet, 2019), and 121-FZ (foreign agent regime, 2012ff.).<sup>57</sup> Coherence is produced not through centralised command but through environment design: legal constraint, infrastructural control, resource allocation, and sanction-based correction define

<sup>53</sup> Vladimir Putin, address at Valdai International Discussion Club, 2024, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75521>.

<sup>54</sup> Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), assessment of Russian military spending, 2024: EUR 202bn, approximately 66% above official figures; combined defence/security at 10% GDP (2025). Reported via The Straits Times.

<sup>55</sup> Vladimir Putin, address at Valdai International Discussion Club, 2024.

<sup>56</sup> Sergei Lavrov, (1) Federation Council "Government Hour," 10 December 2025; (2) Ambassadorial Roundtable, 5 March 2026.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Sauer, "Mx Russia: Information Governance as a Power Function," DURCHD8, January 2026, <https://durchd8.com/mx-russia-information-governance-as-a-power-function/>.

permissible narrative corridors within which heterogeneous actors — state media, intelligence services, proxy organisations, informal networks — self-coordinate. Core narrative frames (external encirclement, Western hypocrisy, defensive necessity) remain stable across all asset types from 2012 to 2026. Deviations are sanctioned selectively through standing information law; enforcement intensity correlates with narrative utility rather than formal legal severity, demonstrating evaluative capacity at governance level.

Cyber-narrative coupling — documented through U.S. Department of Justice indictments (2018) — subordinates cyber operations to informational yield: covert intrusion followed by controlled release through intermediaries and immediate narrative activation. Tempo synchronisation aligns narrative emphasis with diplomatic escalation phases, military deployments, and anticipated Western decision points; information activity preconditions rather than merely accompanies kinetic action.

*Bounded dissent.* The Ivashov case demonstrates how imposed coherence handles internal dissent without directive control.<sup>58</sup> A credible military insider produces pessimistic collapse narratives that are semantically oppositional but functionally aligned: they induce Western hesitation, negotiation fixation, and temporal discounting — decision-space degradation serving regime objectives. The regime does not script the messaging; it evaluates outputs by effect class (destabilising / neutral / externally useful) and permits those within the acceptable effect envelope. Control migrates upstream (to evaluative governance) while authorship remains downstream (with the speaker). This is governance through permissiveness: coherence without rigidity, adaptability without micromanagement.

*Capability ceiling.* The governance function operates at 4.5–5.0 on a 10-point scale: strong institutionalisation and operational coherence raise the floor; absence of explicit narrative architecture, cost-benefit calculus, and higher-order awareness (no engagement with reflexive audience adaptation, narrative exhaustion, long-term legitimacy erosion) lower the ceiling. Three structural reasons — authoritarian closure constraining internal critique, security primacy subordinating optimisation, repression as substitute for design — account for the gap. Russia operates narrative power effectively but below its theoretical potential.

**Sedimented level (inferential).** A longitudinal study of the Russian path from 1989 to 2025 identifies narrative structures that operate independently of Putin's specific content — institutionally embedded and self-reproducing.<sup>59</sup>

*Imperial continuity and siege identity* are sedimentated into security doctrine (Informationssicherheitsdoktrin 2016, sovereign internet 2019), military strategy, media architecture, and the legal system. NATO expansion, Yugoslav wars, and the 1990s economic collapse established a leit-narrative of Western betrayal that predates and outlasts any individual leadership configuration. Orthodox Christianity operates as sacralised *raison d'être*, fusing territory, nation, and transcendent mission.

*Narrative as gatekeeper for hard power.* The 2014 Crimea annexation demonstrates the mechanism: the “Heimkehr” (homecoming) narrative invoking Katharina II and Sevastopol as “cradle

<sup>58</sup> Martin Sauer, “Leonid Ivashov Is Government-Aligned by Design, Not by Command,” DURCHD8, January 2026, <https://durchd8.com/leonid-ivashov-is-government-aligned-by-design-not-by-command/>.

<sup>59</sup> Martin Sauer, “The Shape of Now: Deep Dive Russland,” DURCHD8 working paper, October 2025 (primary-source-based; unpublished; available from the author on request).

of the Russian fleet” made the operation intelligible not as conquest but as restoration. Putin’s approval surged above 80% despite rising costs — empirical evidence that narrative legitimates hard power independently of material welfare. The structure replicates: each crisis (2011 Bolotnaja, 2014 Crimea, 2022 full-scale invasion) triggers narrative escalation, institutional deepening, and further autocratisation in a self-reinforcing cycle.

*Three-layer enemy construction.* Internal (Ukraine as “not a real state”), external (NATO as aggressor), and civilisational (Orthodox versus secular) threat layers are integrated through the master-narrative of *Systemkampf* (system struggle). The layers are interdependent; each reinforces the others. This integration produces the totalising quality of the declared narrative, grounding it in institutional practice rather than rhetorical choice.

The sedimented level is inferential: the evidence supports the claim that normative-narrative structures are operatively embedded in Russian governance architecture independently of leadership-specific content, but the three-level test has not been applied to Instance 3 with the same evidentiary density as to NATO. Finding 3 is accordingly marked “preliminary — constrained by scope” in the Abstract.

**Fragility mode.** Imposed coherence produces a distinct durability profile. Slow erosion is suppressed — the system represses internal contradictions rather than resolving them through C3-iteration. But sudden rupture remains possible when repression costs exceed system capacity or when the coherence-imposing authority is disrupted. The Wagner mutiny (June 2023) demonstrated fragility at the Competence-Legitimacy nexus: a temporary C3-disruption (multiple actors with divergent anticipations) that the system resolved through co-optation rather than institutional mechanisms. NATO erodes slowly through political fragmentation; Russia ruptures suddenly through regime disruption. The 2026 configuration favours the architecture that can exploit seams over the architecture that possesses more material.

#### C.1.4 Seven Findings in Brief

The analysis generates seven findings not formulable without the NP derivation. In condensed form:

1. *Three-layer configuration conflict* requires H.4 + Durability Condition: the sedimented third layer is not identifiable through Meyer/Rowan’s two-layer decoupling alone.
2. *Dispositif paradox* requires R2 + dimensional block: the structural necessity that the durability mechanism is simultaneously the rigidity mechanism follows from R2, not from Zucker or Barnett/Finnemore individually.
3. *T4 asymmetry* requires T4 + D.3.2: referential completeness as an advantage category independent of material power has no address in existing IR frameworks (preliminary — constrained by scope).
4. *Normative cascade* requires D.3.2 + T3 + Suchman coupling (G.5): D.3.2 makes the transmission structurally available; Suchman’s moral-legitimacy coupling to Values and Purpose provides the mechanism; the current stress concentration selects the pathway.

5. *Multi-speed security community* requires T3 + dimensional block: Deutsch/Adler-Barnett phase categories become dimensional configurations specifiable on each axis, not political labels.
6. *Time-compression meta-constraint* requires C3 + Durability Condition + Lemma: the iteration-dynamics failure mode — where coherence-production tempo falls behind stress-injection tempo — is formulable only through these three elements jointly.
7. *Sender-amplification mechanism* requires H2-spine (narrative coordination layer) + D.3.2 + T3: where the H2-spine is unoccupied and Values/Legitimacy are dimensionally vacant, official corrective intervention enters adversary-framed space and amplifies rather than neutralises. Without NP, this is an empirical observation; with it, the mechanism is structurally locatable in the dimensional vacancy.

Annex 1 develops each finding with its full derivation chain and the specific NP elements it requires.

## C.2 ITERATION DYNAMICS UNDER TIME COMPRESSION

The NP derivation establishes C3-iteration as the mechanism through which coordinated roles produce coherence: actors interpret, evaluate, and anticipate signals, and the outcomes re-enter C3 across iterations.<sup>60</sup> The Durability Condition specifies that this process persists over time under actor replacement. Coordination pressure — the evaluation of anticipated versus actual signals — varies in intensity across iterations. Coherence is therefore not a state but a production: it is generated through repeated C3-iteration, and its production has a characteristic tempo.

This yields a meta-constraint that operates across all seven dimensions: **the time window available for coherence production must match the tempo at which coordination pressure arrives**. Where the window closes before iteration can resolve dimensional divergence, the system must either decide in its incoherent state or defer the decision. Both outcomes degrade the architecture. Forced decisions taken before coherence is produced expose dimensional incoherence to observation; the exposure fragments legitimacy and authority (Suchman's moral and cognitive modes);<sup>61</sup> the next iteration begins with less coherence and less time. The pattern accumulates rather than oscillating.

**Path dependence (Pierson) grounds the three-tempo structure.** Historical institutional commitments raise the cost of adaptation exponentially: each decision forecloses alternatives, and the foreclosed alternatives become progressively more expensive to recover.<sup>62</sup> NATO's sedimented expectations (Layer 3 in the configuration conflict that follows) are not slow because they are inherently resistant but because they are path-dependent: the institutional investments required to sustain them have compounded over seven decades, and the switching costs have risen accordingly. The three structural layers the analysis documents (declared,

<sup>60</sup> Martin Sauer, "Narrative Power: How Does Durable Coordinated Power Emerge?" (Preprint, 23 February 2026), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18745256>. C1–C3; Lemma; Bottleneck Theorem; R1–R4; T1–T4; D.3.2 Referential Dependence; H.4 Decoupling.

<sup>61</sup> Mark C. Suchman, "Managing Legitimacy," *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 571–610.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

operative, sedimented) have different adaptation rates because they have different path-dependence histories.

**The OODA cycle (Boyd) formalises the tempo asymmetry.** Observe, Orient, Decide, Act — the canonical decision cycle in military doctrine. An actor whose OODA cycle is shorter than its opponent's operates inside the opponent's decision loop, imposing decisions before the opponent can coherently respond. NATO's institutional OODA cycle, structured by 32-member consensus, NDPP's four-year planning rhythm, and multi-year STANAG development,<sup>63</sup> runs at institutional tempo. Russia's centralised authority — with cadre reorganisation in months, force reconstitution of +234,000 personnel in two years, and Storm-1516 information cycles in days<sup>64</sup> — runs at operational tempo. The adversary systematically operates inside NATO's decision loop. This is a structural property of the 32-member architecture itself, distinct from any capability gap.<sup>65</sup>

**Sensemaking under ambiguity (Weick) describes what C3 does institutionally.** Where Jervis addresses individual perception and misperception,<sup>66</sup> Weick addresses the collective process through which organisations assign meaning to ambiguous signals under stress.<sup>67</sup> NATO's institutional sensemaking operates through summit declarations, NAC consultations, and dispositive-generated interpretive frameworks — all of which require time to converge. Under compression, sensemaking defaults to the simplest available frame, typically the declared one (Layer 1), even when operative conditions have shifted. The result: ceremonial reproduction of declared coherence precisely when operative divergence is deepest.

**Crisis bargaining theory (Snyder/Diesing) specifies the decision-space.** In crisis bargaining under compressed timelines, states face systematic pressure toward premature closure, toward positional hardening, and toward communication patterns that foreclose coherence production.<sup>68</sup> The April 2026 Iran crisis and the Greenland episode both exhibited this pattern: decisions were made through national capitals and ad hoc coalitions precisely because the alliance-level bargaining process could not close in the available window.

Clausewitz's concepts of friction and tempo provide the classical foundation: in compressed-time military decisions, coordination failures compound because corrections themselves require time that is not available.<sup>69</sup> The alliance's most mature military formations understand this at doctrinal level; the institutional architecture above them does not.

The iteration dynamic determines how each of the dimensional findings that follow must be read. A "VIOLATED" T3 marker marks a statement that coherence on that dimension cannot be produced within the current iteration window — a dynamic condition rather than a static

<sup>63</sup> NATO Standardization Office, 1,200+ active STANAGs; NATO, "NATO Defence Planning Process," five-stage, four-year cycle.

<sup>64</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Meeting on the Defence Industry Complex," kremlin.ru. PONARS Eurasia, "Federal and Regional Dynamics of the Kremlin's New Cadre Strategy," 2024. ISW, Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 2025; Belfer Center, Russian Force Reconstitution Assessment, February 2026; ECFR, Russia Assessment 2025. BND, "Öffentliche Attribuierung: Russische Föderation hinter Storm-1516," LinkedIn, ~January 2026; BfV, Election Interference Warning + Storm-1516 Germany Detail, 2025; NewsGuard, Storm-1516 targeting France/Germany Ukraine aid, 2025--2026.

<sup>65</sup> John R. Boyd, "A Discourse on Winning and Losing," briefing materials, 1976--1996; OODA loop formulation as presented in "Patterns of Conflict" (1986).

<sup>66</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

<sup>67</sup> Karl E. Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995).

<sup>68</sup> Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

<sup>69</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* (1832); English: *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

incoherence. The dimensional architecture describes what must cohere; the iteration dynamic describes whether coherence can be produced before the window closes. Both structural beams are required for the diagnosis.

### C.3 THE THREE-LAYER CONFIGURATION CONFLICT

The single most consequential structural finding is that NATO operates not on two layers (formal versus operative) but on three, and that the three layers are mutually inconsistent.

**Layer 1 — Declared order.** Articulated in the Washington Treaty, SC 2022, and the Hague Declaration. Content: community of democratic equals; sovereign equality under consensus; indivisible security; collective defence as *primus inter pares* among three core tasks; full-spectrum competence (360-degree approach); 5% GDP commitment; liberal-democratic values as evaluative standard; triple legitimacy (pragmatic, moral, cognitive).<sup>70</sup>

**Layer 2 — Operative order.** Documented across dimensional analyses through primary evidence:

*Hierarchy.* US-centred, reproduced through four institutional lock-in mechanisms: SACEUR permanence since 1949, nuclear custody under sole US presidential authority, Five Eyes intelligence privilege creating tiered knowledge access, F-35 procurement dependency.<sup>71,72</sup>

*Regional fragmentation.* Three security community tiers.<sup>73,74,75</sup>

*Tempo deficit.* NDPP four-year cycle versus adversarial operations in weeks.<sup>76,77</sup>

*Values shift.* Market-transactional evaluative standard replacing liberal-democratic values through a four-summit grammar shift: Madrid 2022 (Security + Values) to Hague 2025 (Market + Sovereignty).<sup>78,79,80</sup>

*Conversion gap.* Spending-to-capability conversion fails across three chokepoints: personnel, ammunition, procurement.<sup>81,82</sup>

*Purpose divergence.* Five strategic culture clusters.<sup>83</sup> Pragmatic-transactional legitimacy substituting for moral-cognitive legitimacy.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>70</sup> North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, 4 April 1949. NATO, "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept" (Madrid, 29 June 2022). NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," 25 June 2025.

<sup>71</sup> David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Department of War (formerly Department of Defense; secondary title "Department of War" restored September 2025 under the second Trump administration), "2026 National Defense Strategy," 23 January 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

<sup>73</sup> Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

<sup>74</sup> Adler and Barnett, *Security Communities*.

<sup>75</sup> Pew Research Center, "NATO Viewed Favorably Across 13 Member Nations," 23 June 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/06/23/nato-viewed-favorably-across-13-member-nations/>.

<sup>76</sup> NATO, "NATO Defence Planning Process," [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49202.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49202.htm).

<sup>77</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Meeting on the Defence Industry Complex," kremlin.ru. PONARS Eurasia, "Federal and Regional Dynamics of the Kremlin's New Cadre Strategy," 2024.

<sup>78</sup> Elbridge Colby, "NATO Ministerial Remarks," February 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4404801/>.

<sup>79</sup> Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, *The Institutional Logics Perspective*.

<sup>80</sup> NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," 25 June 2025.

<sup>81</sup> NATO, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2025)," 17 June 2025; NATO, "Defence Expenditures and NATO's 5% Commitment," 18 December 2025; IISS, *The Military Balance 2026*.

<sup>82</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2026*. Baltic Defence Line, East Shield. NORDEFECO, "Vision for Nordic Defence Cooperation 2030," signed Torshavn, 30 April 2024, <https://www.nordefco.org/Vision-for-Nordic-Defence-Cooperation-NORDEFECO-2030>.

<sup>83</sup> Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Culture as Context," *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 49–69.

<sup>84</sup> Mark C. Suchman, "Managing Legitimacy," *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 571–610.



**Layer 3 — Sedimented order.** Identified through Class 2 theory application. Content: the US security guarantee as institutional axiom (Ikenberry),<sup>85</sup> the liberal international order as normative normal (Rawls),<sup>86</sup> sovereign equality as ground norm (Deutsch),<sup>87</sup> bureaucratic competence as durability machine (Zucker).<sup>88</sup>

The configuration conflict is that Layer 3 no longer matches Layer 2, while Layer 1 claims to represent a state of affairs that neither Layer 2 nor Layer 3 confirms. European allies plan, budget, and posture as if Layer 3 holds, execute within Layer 2, and report in Layer 1. The misalignment is not a policy disagreement. It is a structural condition reproduced by the institutional architecture itself. Hierarchy, role asymmetry, and selective decoupling within Layer 2 are not inherently pathological — asymmetric alliances routinely operate through such configurations. The diagnostic significance lies in the three-way inconsistency: the declared order does not describe the operative order, the operative order does not match the sedimented expectations, and the sedimented expectations resist adaptation to the operative reality because they operate on a slower temporal register.

## C.4 PER-DIMENSION DIAGNOSIS

Each of the seven dimensions carries a distinct fracture. The sub-sections that follow test coherence on each axis, apply the mechanistic theories that identify why the fracture occurs, and close with a status verdict. Purpose and Values emerge as the most contested; Competence and Resources as the most operationally consequential.

### C.4.1 Identity — Who?

*T3 coherence check: VIOLATED.*

Albert and Whetten's CDE criteria identify four formal identity pillars — Article 5, values community, transatlantic bond, consensus principle — that satisfy centrality and distinctiveness but face operative erosion on the endurance axis.<sup>89</sup> The CDE framework operates at the declarative/perceptive level; the operative divergence is grounded in Lake's hierarchy framework.<sup>90</sup>

Instance 2 introduces a competing identity: the NDS 2026 "Model Allies" versus "Dependencies" taxonomy reclassifies members from equal partners to graded dependents, with Israel as the benchmark.<sup>91,92</sup> The NSS 2025 declares: "The days of the United States propping up the entire world order like Atlas are over."<sup>93</sup>

<sup>85</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>86</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971).

<sup>87</sup> Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

<sup>88</sup> Lynne G. Zucker, "The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence," *American Sociological Review* 42, no. 5 (1977): 726–743.

<sup>89</sup> Stuart Albert and David A. Whetten, "Organizational Identity," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 7 (1985): 263–295.

<sup>90</sup> David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>91</sup> U.S. Department of War (formerly Department of Defense; secondary title "Department of War" restored September 2025 under the second Trump administration), "2026 National Defense Strategy," 23 January 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

<sup>92</sup> Elbridge Colby, "NATO Ministerial Remarks," February 2026.

<sup>93</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf> --- Verification status: 'Atlas' formulation confirmed; 'patriotic European parties' confirmed (verbatim in text); 'civilizational erasure' NOT in official text (from leaked draft --- official text reads 'restoring Europe's civilizational self-confidence'); 'open question about future NATO members' NOT in official text (from leaked draft).



Instance 3 provides reactive identity cohesion through Tajfel/Turner's in-group/out-group mechanism<sup>94</sup> — Russia as civilisational adversary supplies the “them” that defines the “us.”<sup>95</sup> But this mechanism is reactive, not constitutive: it generates cohesion of opposition without shared positive content. Where threat perception diverges (Eastern flank: existential; Southern flank: low Russia focus; US: Indo-Pacific first),<sup>96</sup> the identity-forming mechanism weakens differentially. NATO favourability data confirms the fragmentation: Poland 81%, Germany 70%, Hungary 68%, USA 60%, Turkey 30%, Greece 28%.<sup>97</sup>

The Greenland crisis constitutes the most severe Identity challenge in NATO history. The Danish DDIS identified the US as a potential threat to national security for the first time;<sup>98</sup> the NAC warned that use of force would constitute an Article 1 violation;<sup>99</sup> Greenlandic PM Nielsen stated: “We don't want to be Americans, nor Danes; we are Kalaallit.”<sup>100</sup> Wendt's constructivism frames this as a test of mutual recognition<sup>101</sup> — the Davos framework (January 2026) de-escalated but left the underlying challenge unresolved.<sup>102</sup>

On 1 April 2026, Trump stated he was considering leaving NATO and called the alliance “a paper tiger,” adding: “Putin knows that too.”<sup>103</sup> This is qualitatively different from the NDS 2026's conditionality: it attacks the institution's credibility as such, rather than disciplining performance within the institutional frame.

Formally intact, operatively fragmenting. The configuration conflict runs between US redefinition (Instance 2) and the sedimented expectation of shared democratic community. H.4 decoupling is erosive and accumulating through the normalisation-of-deviance mechanism identified in B.5: each successive departure (NDS conditionality, Greenland coercion, “paper tiger”) resets the baseline against which the next departure is evaluated. Threshold proximity is inferred from the pattern, not directly measured. [Confidence: Medium.]

#### C.4.2 Relationship — To whom?

*T3 coherence check: VIOLATED across all modality pairs.*

The operative Relationship is a US-centred hub-and-spoke fragmenting into regional clusters. Granovetter's strong/weak ties and Burt's structural holes reveal.<sup>104</sup> Nordic-Baltic cluster

<sup>94</sup> Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. W. G. Austin and S. Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47.

<sup>95</sup> Vladimir Putin, address at Valdai International Discussion Club, 2024.

<sup>96</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>97</sup> Pew Research Center, “NATO Viewed Favorably Across 13 Member Nations,” 23 June 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/06/23/nato-viewed-favorably-across-13-member-nations/>. Country-level data. Age-cohort and Euro-barometer data cited separately where applicable.

<sup>98</sup> Danish Defence Intelligence Service (DDIS), *Intelligence Risk Assessment 2025* (Copenhagen: DDIS, 2025).

<sup>99</sup> North Atlantic Council, statement on Greenland sovereignty, January 2026: European allies warned that use of force against a member's territory would constitute an Article 1 violation.

<sup>100</sup> Jens-Frederik Nielsen (Greenlandic PM), statement, 4 January 2026, accessed via CBS News.

<sup>101</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>102</sup> Davos framework, 21 January 2026. NATO official.

<sup>103</sup> Donald Trump, interview with *The Telegraph*, 1 April 2026: “I was never swayed by NATO. I always knew they were a paper tiger, and Putin knows that too.” Reported in *Forbes* (Ray, 1 April 2026); *NTD* (1 April 2026).

<sup>104</sup> Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1360–1380. Ronald S. Burt, *Structural Holes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).



consolidation (NORDEFECO Vision 2030, Baltic Defence Line, East Shield)<sup>105</sup> as the densest strong-tie zone; V4 fragmentation (no heads-of-government summit since February 2024 Prague;<sup>106</sup> the December 2025 Esztergom meeting was a heads-of-state summit with primarily representational function); Poland as rising Eastern flank broker (target: 300,000 active-duty + 200,000 reserves by 2039 per the Armed Forces Development Program of December 2025;<sup>107</sup> ~5% GDP per Polish MFA 2026 foreign policy tasks,<sup>108</sup> massive US procurement including Abrams, HIMARS, F-35).<sup>109</sup>

Lake's hierarchy is structural, not merely political — reproduced through SACEUR (permanently US-held), nuclear custody (US presidential sole authority), Five Eyes intelligence privilege, and F-35 procurement dependence (software/logistics lock-in).<sup>110</sup> Morrow's asymmetric exchange captures the bargain: Europe trades autonomy for security.<sup>111</sup> The 5% target shifts this from "cheap hierarchy" to "expensive partnership," but procurement patterns reproduce the dependency.<sup>112</sup> US troop deployment in Europe traces the material dimension: 305,000 (1991) to 65,000 (2014) to 64,000 (2020, nadir under first Trump term) to 100,000 (2022–2024 post-invasion surge).<sup>113</sup> The material rebound coexists with political conditionality, demonstrating that institutional density and political commitment can move independently.

Snyder's alliance dilemma captures simultaneous abandonment (NDS 2026 relegating Europe to reduced-priority theatre)<sup>114</sup> and entrapment (Coalition of the Willing military hubs in Ukraine per Paris Declaration, January 2026).<sup>115,116</sup> Eastern allies seek entrapment as binding mechanism; Western/Southern allies fear it. Walt's four threat variables are weighted differently across the membership — no common strategic denominator.<sup>117</sup>

Russia's 2024 nuclear doctrine update — lowering the threshold for nuclear use to include conventional aggression creating a 'critical threat' to state sovereignty — directly targets the NATO Article 5 deterrence model by introducing nuclear risk into every conventional scenario.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>105</sup> NORDEFECO, "Vision for Nordic Defence Cooperation 2030," signed Torshavn, 30 April 2024, <https://www.nordefco.org/Vision-for-Nordic-Defence-Cooperation-NORDEFECO-2030>. Estonian Centre for Defence Investments, Baltic Defence Line, up to 600 bunkers, 19 February 2026, <https://www.kaitseinvesteeringud.ee/en/baltic-defence-line/>. Polish Ministry of National Defence, "Shield East (Tarcza Wschód)," ~700 km eastern border fortification, 14 October 2024, <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/shield-east--an-investment-in-peace-and-security>.

<sup>106</sup> Last V4 heads-of-government summit: Prague, 27 February 2024. Esztergom heads-of-state summit: 3–4 December 2025 (Sándor-palota official). Carafano, "The V4 and the future of regional action in Europe," GIS Reports, 28 November 2025.

<sup>107</sup> Polish Armed Forces Development Program, signed by Defence Minister Kosiniak-Kamysz, December 2025. General Staff parameters published January 2026. "Poland targets 500,000 troops by 2039 under new military plan," Polskie Radio, 16 January 2026.

<sup>108</sup> Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Policy Tasks 2026." 4.8% GDP, PLN 200bn, >50% for new equipment.

<sup>109</sup> NATO, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2025)," 17 June 2025; NATO, "Defence Expenditures and NATO's 5% Commitment," 18 December 2025; IISS, *The Military Balance 2026*.

<sup>110</sup> David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>111</sup> James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry," *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (1991): 904–933.

<sup>112</sup> NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," 25 June 2025.

<sup>113</sup> Congressional Research Service, "U.S. Military Presence in Europe: Issues for Congress," updated March 2026. Troop data: 305,000 (1991), 64,000 (2020 nadir), approximately 100,000 (2022–2024 post-invasion surge).

<sup>114</sup> U.S. Department of War (formerly Department of Defense; secondary title "Department of War" restored September 2025 under the second Trump administration), "2026 National Defense Strategy," 23 January 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

<sup>115</sup> Council of the European Union, "Robust Security Guarantees for a Solid and Lasting Peace in Ukraine --- Statement of the Coalition of the Willing issued by France," 6 January 2026. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/01/06/>.

<sup>116</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>117</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>118</sup> Russian Federation, "Basic Principles of State Policy on Nuclear Deterrence," 2024 update. NIPP/Schneider, "Implications of Russia's New Nuclear Doctrine," No. 615, February 2025.



Sixteen documented dissent incidents cluster on Purpose (Ukraine path) and Resources (spending), not on operational Competence — selective pressure, not uniform erosion.<sup>119</sup> The Hungary-Slovakia blockade of February 2026 illustrates how dissent can concentrate into coordinated obstruction.<sup>120</sup>

A seventeenth incident tests the decision threshold from the opposite direction. On 4 March 2026, NATO air defence intercepted an Iranian ballistic missile over Turkey; SG Rutte stated “nobody’s talking about Article 5” and Turkey did not request activation.<sup>121</sup> Capability was demonstrated without political invocation. This is the first kinetic test of collective defence in the current window, and the non-invocation decision is structurally significant for the Relationship between capability (the system worked) and political will (the architecture chose not to activate).

The April 2026 Iran crisis confirmed the relationship pattern: the most consequential coordination occurred through national capitals, the E3, and coalition formats, not through the NAC.<sup>122</sup> The United Kingdom acted as coalition coordinator rather than NATO-institutional mobiliser. Spain and Italy adopted nationally differentiated crisis-management lines; verified evidence of blanket overflight denial remains at Medium confidence. The strongest validated claim is that allies avoided turning the crisis into an alliance question — a pattern of institutional bypass rather than outright refusal.

Hierarchically structured, regionally fragmenting, under simultaneous abandonment/entrapment pressure. The consensus principle approaches ceremonial function, functioning as load-bearing decoupling in routine business but untested under acute collective-defence stress.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Compiled from NATO communiqués, member-state statements, and verified press reporting. Sixteen documented dissent/opt-out/block incidents spanning spending, Ukraine-path, and operational axes. Individual public sources cited at respective analytical locations.

<sup>120</sup> Hungary-Slovakia blockade of 20th EU sanctions package, February 2026. Insurance Journal; EA WorldView, 24 February 2026.

<sup>121</sup> Iranian missile incident / Article 5 non-invocation, 4 March 2026. Turkish Minute; Airforce Technology; RTHK, 5 March 2026.

<sup>122</sup> Mark Rutte, “No talk of triggering NATO’s Article 5,” 5 March 2026 (Economic Times). Bundesregierung, Bundestag, 4 March 2026. MAECI, Gulf Task Force, March 2026. Spain: Robles, JFC Naples, 26 March 2026. Primary sources: Bundesregierung (Pistorius Bundestag speech, 4 March 2026); La Moncloa (Robles Naples, 26 March 2026); MAECI (Tajani crisis coordination, 10 March 2026); AP (ceasefire proposal via Pakistan, 25 March 2026).



### C.4.3 Competence – With what capacity?

*T3 coherence check: VIOLATED on the synchronisation axis.*

The operative Competence is a sophisticated domain-specific bureaucratic apparatus with a structural tempo deficit and cross-domain synchronisation gap. Allison and Zelikow's three models identify a NATO-specific hybrid: Model III (governmental politics) at the political level, Model II (organisational processes) at implementation.<sup>124</sup> The Hague 5% target was a Model III bargaining result – not a strategic assessment – with Spain receiving a formal exemption.<sup>125,126</sup> Janis's groupthink dynamics suppress dissent through the consensus mechanism.<sup>127</sup> March and Olsen's garbage can model explains domain expansion (Cognitive Warfare as "solution push" from ACT).<sup>128</sup>

Foucault's dispositif framework captures NATO's C3 steering: STANAGs (1,200+ active standards),<sup>129</sup> NDPP (5-stage, 4-year cycle),<sup>130</sup> SC 2022 threat taxonomy,<sup>131</sup> and the NDC/NSO socialisation pipeline shape how actors interpret and evaluate – C3 steering in NP terms.<sup>132</sup> DiMaggio and Powell's three isomorphism mechanisms explain why institutional coherence persists despite political fragmentation: coercive (spending targets), mimetic (Cyber Command adoption), normative (PME as career gate).<sup>133</sup>

Barnett and Finnemore's IO pathology framework identifies four simultaneous dysfunctions: mission creep (Art. 5 → 360-degree global actor), classification expansion (each new threat category spawns structures), insulation from feedback (Afghanistan metrics failure), normalisation of deviance (2%→5% escalation without enforcement).<sup>134</sup>

The structural finding under R3/T3: NATO's institutional adaptation cycle operates in years; Russia's permanent, whole-of-government information warfare operates in weeks.<sup>135</sup> This is the Competence-dimension expression of the iteration-dynamics meta-constraint (C.2): the OODA asymmetry Boyd formalises operates here as a years-versus-weeks differential, with the adversary systematically inside NATO's decision loop.<sup>136</sup>

Operational responses to hybrid probing demonstrate the capability side of this gap. Eastern Sentry (launched 12 September 2025) and Baltic Sentry (launched 14 January 2025) were deployed in response to subsea infrastructure threats,<sup>137</sup> and the NAC characterised Russian airspace violations as 'escalatory,' committing to respond 'robustly' in 'timing and domain

<sup>124</sup> Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999).

<sup>125</sup> NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," 25 June 2025. SIPRI, "NATO's New Spending Target: Challenges and Risks Associated with a Political Signal," 2025: "The 5 per cent target is, above all, a political statement." Bocconi IEP, "NATO's 5% Pledge: Political Symbol or Strategic Shift?," 2025.

<sup>126</sup> Government of Spain, La Moncloa, official statement on 5% defence spending target, 22 June 2025 (lamoncloa.gob.es).

<sup>127</sup> Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

<sup>128</sup> James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1972): 1--25.

<sup>129</sup> NATO Standardization Office, 1,200+ active STANAGs.

<sup>130</sup> NATO, "NATO Defence Planning Process," [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49202.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49202.htm).

<sup>131</sup> NATO, "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept" (Madrid, 29 June 2022).

<sup>132</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

<sup>133</sup> Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (1983): 147--160.

<sup>134</sup> Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>135</sup> NATO Allied Command Transformation, "Cognitive Warfare Concept," MC-endorsed November 2025; NATO StratCom COE, Riga. Based on NATO official StratCom documents, ACT CogWar programme, SHAPE J10 operational capability.

<sup>136</sup> John R. Boyd, "A Discourse on Winning and Losing," briefing materials, 1976--1996; OODA loop formulation as presented in "Patterns of Conflict" (1986).

<sup>137</sup> NATO, "Eastern Sentry Launch," 12 September 2025 (nato.int). NATO, "Baltic Sentry Launch," 14 January 2025 (nato.int).

of our choosing.<sup>138</sup> Latvia's SAB annual report documents a four-fold increase in Russian sabotage operations against European infrastructure in 2024,<sup>139</sup> corroborating the tempo-mismatch diagnosis at the operational level.

A three-tier NATO information capability exists (SHAPE J10 operational, ACT CogWar concept MC-endorsed November 2025, StratCom COE Riga advisory),<sup>140</sup> but the IEA requires 48+18 new positions<sup>141</sup> — still scaling. The asymmetry is tempo-mismatch; capability is present.

Russian competence comparison: BND estimates real spending at EUR 202bn, ~66% above official figures, combined defence/security at 10% GDP.<sup>142</sup> Force reconstitution: +234,000 personnel despite Ukraine losses.<sup>143</sup> Personnel reconfiguration (Belousov → DefMin) indicates prolonged confrontation preparation.<sup>144</sup>

Domain-specifically strong but cross-domain incoherent, with a structural tempo deficit. The durability-rigidity paradox identified in C.8 operates here directly: procedural stability enables interoperability while preventing adaptation to adversarial tempo.

#### C.4.4 Values — By what standard?

*T3 coherence check: VIOLATED AT MAXIMUM AMPLITUDE — widest modality gap in the 7D block.*

The operative Values standard has shifted from normative quality to quantified output. Bourdieu's field theory reveals that security capital outweighs normative capital: geopolitical utility (Turkey's Bosphorus, Hungary's veto) overrides values enforcement.<sup>145</sup> The spending target operates as "ritual capital" — a badge of honour determining alliance position. Post-2022, Eastern European states gained "told-you-so" moral capital; Germany lost symbolic capital (Zeitenwende as belated restoration).<sup>146</sup>

Rawls's principles — sovereign equality, procedural fairness, reciprocity — operate as sedimented normative expectations (Class 2: the liberal order expectation is itself the dimensional filling).<sup>147</sup> These expectations generate institutional shock when violated (Greenland coercion, Model Allies hierarchy)<sup>148,149</sup> — confirming their sedimentation depth. But they are declarative-sedimented, not operative.

<sup>138</sup> North Atlantic Council, "Statement on Russian Airspace Violations," 23 September 2025 (nato.int).

<sup>139</sup> SAB Latvia, Annual Report 2024 (Riga: Constitution Protection Bureau, 2025).

<sup>140</sup> SACEUR Grynkewich, "Cognitive Campaign and Decisive Hour," 2025--2026.

<sup>141</sup> NATO Allied Command Transformation, IEA Capability Programme Plan (Madrid Summit mandate, 2022--). ACT official programme documentation.

<sup>142</sup> Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), assessment of Russian military spending, 2024.

<sup>143</sup> ISW, Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 2025; Belfer Center, Russian Force Reconstitution Assessment, February 2026; ECFR, Russia Assessment 2025.

<sup>144</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Meeting on the Defence Industry Complex," kremlin.ru. PONARS Eurasia, "Federal and Regional Dynamics of the Kremlin's New Cadre Strategy," 2024.

<sup>145</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241--258.

<sup>146</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241--258.

<sup>147</sup> John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971).

<sup>148</sup> North Atlantic Council, statement on Greenland sovereignty, January 2026: European allies warned that use of force against a member's territory would constitute an Article 1 violation.

<sup>149</sup> Elbridge Colby, "NATO Ministerial Remarks," February 2026.

Thornton and Ocasio's institutional logics framework tracks the evaluative grammar across summit cycles:<sup>150</sup> Madrid 2022 (Security + Values) → Vilnius 2023 (Consensus + Security) → Washington 2024 (Security + Bureaucracy) → Hague 2025 (Market + Sovereignty).<sup>151</sup> "Production lines," "demand signals," "deliverable military output" replace "democracy," "liberty," "rule of law."

VP Vance's visit to Budapest on 7 April 2026 — five days before Hungary's 12 April election — delivered overt hegemonic campaign support for the alliance's most illiberal member (full assessment in C.12).<sup>152</sup>

External values contestation operates on two distinct vectors. Putin characterises Western liberalism as "extreme intolerance and aggression."<sup>153</sup> Storm-1516 campaigns target values credibility in France and Germany.<sup>154</sup> The MSR 2026 finds the "grand narrative has lost persuasive power."<sup>155</sup>

Chinese IO operates on different dimensional axes (Resources, Competence, Legitimacy via Three Warfares — public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, legal warfare/lawfare) than Russian IO (Values, Purpose — chaos-centric fabrication and disruption).<sup>156</sup> Four independent sources corroborate the distinction: the NATO Vilnius Summit Communiqué identifying PRC as a "systemic challenge" operating through different mechanisms than Russia's "direct threat";<sup>157</sup> BfV documentation of Chinese cyber-espionage (i-Soon leaks) targeting institutional competence rather than public opinion;<sup>158</sup> maritime CUI incidents (NewNew Polar Bear, Yi Peng 3, Eagle S) operating on the Resources/infrastructure axis;<sup>159</sup> and HCSS analysis distinguishing Chinese "structural-institutional" from Russian "disruption-centric" hybrid methodologies.<sup>160</sup> The complementarity multiplies pressure without requiring coordination.

Most decoupled dimension in the block. Declared filling (liberal-democratic) and operative filling (market-transactional) are maximally divergent. The decoupling is erosive: it hollows the normative reserve on which moral legitimacy rests. The accumulation logic (B.5) operates here with maximum amplitude: each summit's lexical shift from normative to transactional vocabulary normalises the deviation further, and the moral-cognitive reserve that would buffer a legitimacy shock is already substantially hollowed. H.4 at or near threshold. [Confidence: Medium-High — widest modality gap directly observable; threshold proximity inferred from exhaustion of the normative reserve.]

<sup>150</sup> Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, The Institutional Logics Perspective.

<sup>151</sup> NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," 25 June 2025.

<sup>152</sup> JD Vance, joint press conference with Viktor Orbán, Budapest, 7 April 2026 (C-SPAN video). AP, "Vance says he's here to help Orbán's election campaign," 7 April 2026. Reuters, "Key Quotes from Vance and Orban's News Conference," 7 April 2026.

<sup>153</sup> Vladimir Putin, address at Valdai International Discussion Club, 2024.

<sup>154</sup> BND, "Öffentliche Attribuierung: Russische Föderation hinter Storm-1516," LinkedIn, ~January 2026; BfV, Election Interference Warning + Storm-1516 Germany Detail, 2025; NewsGuard, Storm-1516 targeting France/Germany Ukraine aid, 2025--2026.

<sup>155</sup> Munich Security Conference, "Under Destruction --- Munich Security Report 2026," central thesis chapter: "Wrecking-Ball Politics" and Zerstörungslust.

<sup>156</sup> Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), Craig Singleton, testimony before House Foreign Affairs Committee on Chinese information operations; NATO StratCom COE, Riga.

<sup>157</sup> NATO, "Vilnius Summit Communiqué," 11 July 2023.

<sup>158</sup> BfV, "Cyber Insight: The i-Soon Leaks," 3 parts, August 2024.

<sup>159</sup> Maritime CUI incidents: NewNew Polar Bear (Oct 2023, Balticconnector pipeline), Yi Peng 3 (Nov 2024, BCS East-West Interlink), Eagle S (Dec 2024, Estlink 2), Fitburg (Dec 2025, Helsinki-Tallinn cable). CBS News; Euronews; The Register.

<sup>160</sup> HCSS, "Responding to China's Hybrid Threats," January 2026.



### C.4.5 Resources — Over what?

*T3 coherence check: PARTIALLY VIOLATED — input coherence, output incoherence.*

The classical Olson/Zeckhauser free-rider prediction is partially inverted:<sup>161</sup> Poland 4.7%, Estonia 3.4% versus US 3.21%.<sup>162</sup> Security has become a “private survival good” for exposed members — the free-rider effect is overwhelmed by direct threat proximity. The classical pattern persists at the southern and western flanks: Spain exemption at 2.1%,<sup>163</sup> Belgium “not reasonable.”<sup>164</sup>

**Material overextension: spending-to-capability conversion fails at three structural choke-points.**

*Personnel.* Estonia fields ~4,200 professional active-duty cadre (excluding ~4,000 conscripts and 38,000 reservists) against 600 planned bunker installations along the Baltic Defence Line.<sup>165</sup>

*Ammunition.* The structural gap has narrowed — combined Western production reached ~3.2 million 155mm rounds/year by 2026 against a Ukrainian operational consumption of ~6,000–7,000 rounds/day — but simultaneous front supply and strategic stockpile replenishment remains mathematically infeasible.<sup>166</sup>

*Procurement.* National champion competition across 32 members constrains the conversion rate. [Confidence: Medium-High — structural argument; quantification requires classified data.]<sup>167</sup>

Mann’s IEMP framework captures the resource shift:<sup>168</sup> military power restructured (expeditionary → static heavy defensive: Baltic Defence Line 600 bunker units, East Shield 700km); economic power channelled through SAFE/EDIP; political power constrained by consensus; ideological power — needed to legitimate 5% spending against social programme cuts — unfulfilled.<sup>169</sup> US arms exports to Europe increased 217% post-2022,<sup>170</sup> simultaneously strengthening material contribution and reproducing Lake’s hierarchy through procurement dependency.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>161</sup> Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, “An Economic Theory of Alliances,” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 48, no. 3 (1966): 266–279.

<sup>162</sup> NATO, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2025),” 17 June 2025; NATO, “Defence Expenditures and NATO’s 5% Commitment,” 18 December 2025; IISS, *The Military Balance* 2026.

<sup>163</sup> Government of Spain, La Moncloa, official statement on 5% defence spending target, 22 June 2025 ([lamoncloa.gob.es](https://lamoncloa.gob.es)).

<sup>164</sup> Belgium, FM Prévot: “not reasonable,” May 2025. Reuters, “Proposed 3.5% defence spending target not reasonable, Belgium minister says,” 8 May 2025.

<sup>165</sup> ERR News, “Defence Forces looking to recruit and retain more active-duty soldiers,” 21 March 2025. Estonian Centre for Defence Investments (ECDI), Baltic Defence Line procurement of up to 600 bunkers, 19 February 2026, <https://www.kaitseinvesteeringud.ee/en/estonia-procures-hundreds-of-bunkers-for-the-baltic-defence-line/>.

<sup>166</sup> EU ASAP target: 2 million rounds/year by 2025/2026. US production: ~40,000 rounds/month (*National Defense Magazine*, August 2025). Ukrainian peak consumption: ~6,000–7,176 rounds/day (RUSI, Vershinin 2022; Habtoor Research 2024). SG Rutte, November 2025: NATO “no longer behind Russia in ammunition output” (Anadolu Agency). The structural constraint is not raw production parity but simultaneous supply + replenishment.

<sup>167</sup> NATO, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2025),” 17 June 2025; NATO, “Defence Expenditures and NATO’s 5% Commitment,” 18 December 2025; IISS, *The Military Balance* 2026.

<sup>168</sup> Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>169</sup> Polish Ministry of National Defence, “Tarcza Wschód,” 14 October 2024, <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/shield-east--an-investment-in-peace-and-security>.

<sup>170</sup> SIPRI, *Arms Transfers Database*, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

<sup>171</sup> David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

SAFE (EUR 150bn, 35% non-EU procurement restriction) represents the European industrial autonomy instrument;<sup>172</sup> first-tranche allocation is vulnerability-driven (Poland EUR 43.73bn, Romania EUR 16.68bn) (tentative allocations per IAI calculation).<sup>173</sup> F-35 procurement across major allies simultaneously reproduces US industrial dominance.<sup>174</sup>

Nominally strengthening. Operatively constrained by the spending-to-capability conversion gap and the hierarchy-reproduction mechanism.

#### C.4.6 Purpose – What for?

*T3 coherence check: VIOLATED AT FOUNDATIONAL LEVEL – highest-risk dimension.*

Gray's strategic culture framework identifies five distinct purpose orientations:<sup>175</sup> Atlantic (US, UK, CAN – global power competition, Indo-Pacific priority), Continental (FRA, DEU – European autonomy versus transatlantic reanchoring; Germany's *Zeitenwende* proclaimed but societal war-readiness lacking), Nordic (FIN, SWE, NOR, DEN – Total Defence, seamless military-civil integration), Eastern (POL, Baltics, ROM – existential deterrence; Poland's "politics of attractiveness" binding Washington through massive procurement), Southern (ITA, ESP, GRC, TUR – stability management, migration, Sahel). The finding: "forced convergence at operational level, sustained divergence at political-strategic level."

SC 2022 defines three core tasks with deterrence as *primus inter pares*.<sup>176</sup> NDS 2026 defines a radically different priority: Defend Homeland → Deter China → Increase Burden-Sharing → Supercharge DIB; Europe designated reduced-priority theatre; Ukraine "Europe's responsibility first and foremost."<sup>177</sup> Two authoritative documents define NATO's purpose differently – a formal contradiction within the foundational architecture.

Ukraine's late-March 2026 Gulf security agreements (framework defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia, ten-year defence partnership with Qatar, drone defence advisory with Jordan and the UAE) demonstrate security entrepreneurship outside the NATO frame.<sup>178</sup> Ukrainian military experts were already deployed in Saudi Arabia assessing adaptations against Iranian Shaheds and missiles. This does not negate the NATO accession path, but it demonstrates that Ukraine is building operative security relevance independently – a sixth purpose vector operating beyond the five intra-alliance cultures. The "irreversible path" formula (Hague 2025) coexists with a blocked political reality and an expanding bilateral security portfolio.

<sup>172</sup> European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP), December 2025. SAFE: EUR 150bn. [https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/edip-dedicated-programme-defence\\_en](https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/edip-dedicated-programme-defence_en).

<sup>173</sup> Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), "The European Defence Industry Programme: The Last Piece of the EU Defence Puzzle?" 2 February 2026; figures are IAI-aggregated tentative allocations based on requested loan volumes, not official EU Commission allocation decisions.

<sup>174</sup> David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>175</sup> Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Culture as Context," *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 49–69.

<sup>176</sup> NATO, "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept" (Madrid, 29 June 2022).

<sup>177</sup> U.S. Department of War (formerly Department of Defense; secondary title "Department of War" restored September 2025 under the second Trump administration), "2026 National Defense Strategy," 23 January 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

<sup>178</sup> President of Ukraine official readouts, 27–30 March 2026: Saudi Arabia (framework defence cooperation agreement, Ukrainian experts deployed), Qatar (10-year defence partnership), Jordan (drone/missile defence cooperation), UAE (defence-sector cooperation).

Ikenberry's framework operates as a Class 2 sedimented instantiation:<sup>179</sup> the liberal institutional order's purpose was guaranteed by the hegemon. If the hegemon redefines its purpose, the institutional purpose becomes unanchored. This is not an analytical instrument applied from outside but the expectation structure that generates the shock when violated.

A temporal fracture prevents consensus on a Theory of Victory: Eastern allies' force posture decisions (Baltic Defence Line, East Shield) presuppose a near-term Russian threat within the current decade;<sup>180</sup> Western European states' planning cycles and industrial timelines presuppose protracted systemic competition measured in decades.<sup>181</sup>

Most contested dimension. Five divergent strategic cultures, the SC 2022 / NDS 2026 contradiction unresolved, no agreed Theory of Victory, Ukraine building parallel purpose outside the NATO frame. Under T4, this incompleteness constrains durability across the entire block.

#### C.4.7 Legitimacy – By what right?

*T3 coherence check: VIOLATED on the moral-cognitive axes.*

Suchman's three-mode framework identifies the operative shift:<sup>182</sup>

*Pragmatic legitimacy (exchange-based):* NATO delivers Article 5 protection; zero attacks on member territory; force posture expanding (Arctic Sentry, Steadfast Defender).<sup>183</sup> Eroding: capability gaps, Spain exemption.<sup>184</sup>

*Moral legitimacy (normative):* Eroding. Hungary's pro-Russian alignment,<sup>185</sup> Turkey's press restrictions and autonomous operations,<sup>186</sup> US domestic democratic erosion (Thimm: four domains – civil service, judiciary, legislature, civil society),<sup>187</sup> Greenland coercion.<sup>188</sup> The "legitimacy trap": pragmatic metric substitution for moral standard erodes the normative basis sustaining cognitive taken-for-grantedness. The Vance-Budapest visit (7 April 2026) confirmed the erosion: overt hegemonic campaign support for the alliance's most illiberal member weakens the claim that values language is more than ceremonial (full assessment in C.12).

*Cognitive legitimacy (taken-for-granted):* Fragmenting across three distinct vectors.

*Disinformation penetration:* Political Capital's 2024 CEDMO/HDMO survey found that 62% of Hungarian respondents agreed, strongly or rather, with the statement that "Ukraine has previously committed genocide against the Russian minority living on its territory" – a known Russian disinformation narrative (comparative: Bulgaria 44%, Czechia 27%, Slovakia 32%;

<sup>179</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>180</sup> ISW, *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment*, September 2025; Belfer Center, *Russian Force Reconstitution Assessment*, February 2026; ECFR, *Russia Assessment* 2025.

<sup>181</sup> NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," 25 June 2025.

<sup>182</sup> Mark C. Suchman, "Managing Legitimacy," *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 571–610.

<sup>183</sup> NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," 25 June 2025.

<sup>184</sup> Government of Spain, La Moncloa, official statement on 5% defence spending target, 22 June 2025 ([lamoncloa.gob.es](https://lamoncloa.gob.es)).

<sup>185</sup> Hungarian Government, public opposition to Ukraine NATO accession, June 2025. Official government portal.

<sup>186</sup> Turkey: FM Fidan, Bloomberg TV interview, 21 February 2025; Turkish MoD, Reuters, 21 August 2025; Turkey blocking Israel NATO exercise participation, *Turkish Minute*, 12 March 2025.

<sup>187</sup> Johannes Thimm, "Systemsprenger: Donald Trump und die Erosion der Demokratie in den USA," *SWP-Studie* 2, January 2026.

<sup>188</sup> North Atlantic Council, statement on Greenland sovereignty, January 2026: European allies warned that use of force against a member's territory would constitute an Article 1 violation.



representative CAPI survey, n=1,000).<sup>189</sup> [Confidence: High — verified survey, Political Capital/HDMO, January 2025.]

*Generational utility-scepticism:* In the United States, fewer than half of Gen Z respondents (47%) say NATO makes the country safer, though 79% support maintaining or increasing the commitment.<sup>190</sup> The 50-year trendline of US public support for active global engagement is at its lowest recorded level (56% among Gen Z).<sup>191</sup> In Central and Eastern Europe, GLOBSEC records a Defense Paradox: 78% of CEE respondents would defend an allied country under Article 5, but only 68% would defend their own country — a 10–22 point gap varying by state.<sup>192</sup>

*Partisan fragmentation:* US Republicans under 50 support active global engagement at 38%, versus 63% among Republicans over 50.<sup>193</sup> The generational and partisan axes intersect, producing a narrowing cognitive base for alliance legitimacy concentrated in older, Democratic-leaning US cohorts and in frontline European states with direct threat exposure.

Suchman's three modes couple directly to the dimensional architecture (Role-Signal-Interpretation-Meaning coupling per NP G.5): Pragmatic legitimacy maps to Resources and Relationship. Moral legitimacy maps to Values and Purpose. Cognitive legitimacy maps to Identity and Competence. The dimensional erosion pattern tracks the legitimacy erosion pattern.

Four-phase timeline: (1) 2022–2023: All modes surged post-invasion. (2) 2024: Internal friction, war fatigue, right-wing rise. (3) 2025: Hague 5% as pragmatic response; US Republican belief that the US benefits from NATO membership declines (51%→47%). (4) 2026: Spain rejects 5% (pragmatic gap), Greenland + transactionalism (moral assault), Slovakia/Hungary near-complete cognitive erosion.

The 1 April 2026 “paper tiger” statement<sup>194</sup> represents a transition from acute erosion (Phase 4, documented through 2026) to **direct institutional delegitimation by the hegemon** — qualitatively different from conditionality because it attacks the institution's credibility as such rather than disciplining performance within the institutional frame. Whether this constitutes a durable Phase 5 or rhetorical escalation without institutional follow-through remains to be determined by subsequent policy acts. [Confidence: High on the qualitative escalation (consistent with the NDS-to-conditionality trajectory); Medium on Phase 5 categorisation (dependent on institutional follow-through).]

<sup>189</sup> Political Capital, “Conspiracy Beliefs, Disinformation, and Factual Relativism in East-Central Europe: Insights from a Comparative Survey in 2024,” January 2025. [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/HDMO-CEDMO-BROD\\_survey\\_2024\\_ENG.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/HDMO-CEDMO-BROD_survey_2024_ENG.pdf).

<sup>190</sup> Chicago Council on Global Affairs, “Young Americans Support NATO but Unsure It Makes United States Safer,” 9 July 2024. March 2024 survey: 47% Gen Z say NATO makes US safer; 79% support maintaining/increasing commitment.

<sup>191</sup> Chicago Council on Global Affairs, “America's Foreign Policy Future: Public Opinion and 2024 Election,” 2024, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americas-foreign-policy-future-public-opinion-and-2024-election>.

<sup>192</sup> GLOBSEC, Trends 2025. CEE average NATO support 82% (up from 73% in 2021). Defense Paradox: 78% would defend allies (Art. 5) vs. 68% would defend own country.

<sup>193</sup> Pew Research Center, “Younger Americans Are Less Likely Than Others to Support an Active Role for the U.S. in World Affairs,” 22 December 2025 (partisan-age intersection data). Trend context: Pew Research Center, “Growing Partisan Divisions Over NATO and Ukraine,” 8 May 2024 (51% Republicans: US benefits from NATO membership); Pew Research Center, “US Views of Ukraine Aid, NATO and European Defense in 2025,” 14 February 2025 (47% Republicans).

<sup>194</sup> Donald Trump, interview with The Telegraph, 1 April 2026. Reported in Forbes (Ray, 1 April 2026); NTD (1 April 2026). Full sourcing at first citation (C.4.1).

The legitimacy base is shifting from durable modes (moral-cognitive) to fragile modes (pragmatic-transactional). Structurally, the dimension is now vulnerable to benefit interruption.

The dimensional diagnosis is complete. Every dimension exhibits T3 violation; Purpose and Values carry the highest structural risk; Competence and Resources function domain-specifically but fail cross-domain. No dimension fails alone. The sections that follow connect the fractures: block mechanisms (C.5) that sustain the architecture despite political erosion, operative coherence (C.6) and the core-task output test (C.7) that calibrate what the architecture still delivers, the dispositif paradox (C.8) that identifies the structural reason it cannot adapt, transmission pathways (C.9) that show how failure propagates across dimensional boundaries, and structural tests — Greenland (C.10), adversary asymmetry (C.11), the Habermasian contradiction (C.12), external contestation (C.13), the cognitive-narrative deficit (C.14) — that expose the carrying capacity of the whole.

## C.5 BLOCK MECHANISMS

Five persistence mechanisms explain why NATO survives despite political fragmentation. Zucker specifies that sedimented procedures persist under actor replacement.<sup>195</sup> Berger/Luckmann trace the sequence (habitualisation → objectivation → sedimentation): NATO has objectivated into taken-for-granted European security infrastructure.<sup>196</sup> DiMaggio/Powell identify three isomorphism mechanisms that drive convergence below the political contestation level.<sup>197</sup> North shows that complementary organisations develop reproduction interests beyond original purpose.<sup>198</sup> Wallander/Keohane establish that architecture adapts when purpose changes — the architecture is more durable than any purpose filling.<sup>199</sup>

Meyer/Rowan decoupling is the dominant block-level mechanism:<sup>200</sup> four patterns — consensus as ceremony, spending as token, values declaration vs. operative tolerance, Ukraine membership as eroding narrative. The decoupling is structural — it is the mechanism through which the alliance absorbs the gap between declared unity and operative fragmentation. But functional decoupling (load-bearing, absorptive) can transition to erosive decoupling (hollowing the normative reserve) without a clear threshold indicator. That transition is the carrying-capacity question B.5 addresses.

The three-way decoupling identified through the Layer analysis (C.3) extends Meyer/Rowan beyond the standard two-layer model: it is not merely declared versus operative but declared versus operative versus sedimented. The sedimented layer introduces a third decoupling surface — European allies operate within Layer 2 while presupposing Layer 3 — and this additional surface multiplies the points at which the institutional architecture can absorb or fail to absorb contradictions.

<sup>195</sup> Lynne G. Zucker, "The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence," *American Sociological Review* 42, no. 5 (1977): 726–743.

<sup>196</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

<sup>197</sup> DiMaggio and Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited."

<sup>198</sup> Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>199</sup> Celeste A. Wallander and Robert O. Keohane, "Risk, Threat, and Security Institutions," in *Imperfect Unions*, ed. H. Haftendorn, R. O. Keohane, and C. A. Wallander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>200</sup> Meyer and Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations."



Deutsch/Adler-Barnett security community assessment yields a multi-speed configuration:<sup>201,202</sup> mature institutional core (Nordic-Baltic), a transatlantic centre exhibiting stress indicators within sustained institutional density on Identity and Legitimacy, and a nascent/transactional periphery (Turkey, Hungary, Slovakia).

The stress indicators at the centre include partisanisation of NATO legitimacy in the US, Greenland coercion testing dependable peaceful change expectations, and elite movement from normative certainty to conditional support — coexisting with continued high interoperability, planning routines, and integrated defence infrastructure.<sup>203</sup> The “stressed centre” label is proxy-based and inferential; the evidence is stronger for stress within maturity than for a fully measured phase shift. [Confidence: Medium.]

Turkey’s Sweden/Finland blockade (600+ days, resolved through transactional F-16 trade rather than community norms) and the Greenland crisis directly tested the “dependable expectation of peaceful change.” The bypass mechanism used in 2003 (Defence Planning Committee) no longer exists — the DPC was dissolved in 2010.<sup>204</sup>

The multi-speed configuration and the proliferation of minilateral formats (NORDEFECO, E3, Quint, bilateral defence agreements) create institutional redundancy: if one coordination pathway is blocked, alternatives absorb the load. This redundancy is real and functionally significant — the April 2026 Iran crisis demonstrated that allies can coordinate through national and coalition formats when the NAC is not activated.<sup>205</sup> Redundancy compensates operationally without strengthening the whole. Antifragility requires that the system improve under stress; NATO’s minilateralisms become *necessary* under stress because the central architecture delivers less, not *better* because stress strengthens the whole. The distinction matters because deterrence rests on the credibility of the *collective* commitment (Article 5 is indivisible or it is nothing). If the adversary can calibrate that the alliance fragments into partial coalitions under pressure, the deterrence function of the whole — which no minilateral subset can replicate — erodes even as the parts compensate operationally.

Hannan/Freeman’s population ecology raises whether NATO’s organisational form — consensus-based, 32-member collective defence — remains viable in an environment rewarding speed and centralised decision-making.<sup>206</sup> Jervis’s perception/misperception operates as a C3-level block mechanism affecting signal processing across all dimensions.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>201</sup> Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

<sup>202</sup> Adler and Barnett, *Security Communities*.

<sup>203</sup> Congressional Research Service, “U.S. Military Presence in Europe: Issues for Congress,” updated March 2026. Troop data: 305,000 (1991), 64,000 (2020 nadir), approximately 100,000 (2022–2024 post-invasion surge).

<sup>204</sup> NATO, “Decision Sheet of the Defence Planning Committee,” 16 February 2003. NATO, “NATO to deploy defensive assistance to Turkey,” 19 February 2003. DPC dissolved 2010.

<sup>205</sup> Mark Rutte, “No talk of triggering NATO’s Article 5,” 5 March 2026 (*Economic Times*). Bundesregierung, Bundestag, 4 March 2026. MAECI, Gulf Task Force, March 2026. Spain: Robles, JFC Naples, 26 March 2026.

<sup>206</sup> Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman, “The Population Ecology of Organizations,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 5 (1977): 929–964.

<sup>207</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).



## C.6 OPERATIVE COHERENCE: WHAT THE ARCHITECTURE DELIVERS

The preceding sections document incoherence across all seven dimensions. The diagnosis requires calibration against what NATO has effectively coordinated in the same period — not to relativise the findings but to establish the baseline against which incoherence is measured. Managed decoupling, by definition, implies that something is being managed.

The quantitative record establishes the denominator. The NAC meets at ambassadorial level approximately 45–50 times per year, supplemented by 22–24 ministerial sessions and 6 summits across the 2022–2026 window.<sup>208</sup> Behind each session stands a cascade of preparatory decisions, authorisations, and administrative acts processed through the silence procedure — a mechanism by which proposals are adopted unless a member explicitly breaks silence within a set deadline.<sup>209</sup> Conservative estimates place the annual volume at 3,000 to 5,000 formal consensus decisions across five categories: strategy and policy, military posture, operations, resource planning, and personnel management.<sup>210</sup> Over 4.25 years (January 2022 to April 2026), this yields approximately 12,750 to 21,250 total consensus decisions. The sixteen documented dissent, opt-out, and blockade incidents (C.5) represent less than 0.2% of the total volume; restricted to high-level political and strategic decisions (estimated 1,200–2,100), the ratio remains below 1.5%. The consensus mechanism's operative output is orders of magnitude larger than its visible friction points.

Between 2022 and 2026, NATO delivered five concrete outputs.

*Force posture adaptation.* The most rapid in post-Cold War history: Steadfast Defender 2024 with 90,000 troops from 31 nations;<sup>211</sup> Baltic and Eastern Sentry deployments;<sup>212</sup> forward-deployed battlegroups scaled to brigade level.

*Nordic-Baltic integration.* The institutional accession of Finland and Sweden converted the zone from a strategic gap to the alliance's densest interoperability cluster.<sup>213</sup>

*Ukraine coordination mechanism.* NSATU (Wiesbaden, December 2024) channels USD 4bn+ through the PURL mechanism.<sup>214</sup>

*Spending step-change.* The Hague 5% commitment produced the largest year-on-year defence spending increase in alliance history (EUR 100bn), whatever its conversion problems.<sup>215</sup>

*Kinetic defence.* The successful missile intercept over Turkey (4 March 2026) demonstrated that the kinetic defence architecture functions even when the political activation decision is withheld.<sup>216</sup>

<sup>208</sup> NATO, "North Atlantic Council," <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/organization/nato-structure/north-atlantic-council-nac>. FOI Memo 8507, "NATO Decision-Making: Is the 'Consensus Rule' Still Fit for Purpose?" Swedish Defence Research Agency.

<sup>209</sup> Sven Verhelst, "How NATO Decisions Are Made: NATO Consensus Decision-Making," Working Paper 230 (KU Leuven, 2014).

<sup>210</sup> NATO, "The 2025–2029 Common Funding Resource Plan," 18 July 2024. Hague Defence Investment Plan (5% commitment), 25 June 2025. In 2025, military authorities alone processed over 600 specific capability requirements requiring consensual authorisation.

<sup>211</sup> SHAPE, "Steadfast Defender 2024," 90,000 troops from 31 nations.

<sup>212</sup> NATO, "Eastern Sentry Launch," 12 September 2025 (nato.int). NATO, "Baltic Sentry Launch," 14 January 2025 (nato.int).

<sup>213</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2026* (London: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2026).

<sup>214</sup> NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU), established December 2024, Wiesbaden.

<sup>215</sup> NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," 25 June 2025. Defence expenditure data: NATO Public Diplomacy Division.

<sup>216</sup> Iran crisis, 4 March 2026. Missile intercept over Turkish airspace confirmed by NATO SHAPE and verified press reporting (Reuters; AP).

These are not marginal achievements. They demonstrate that the operational cascade (Relationship → Competence → Resources) delivers real military output. The dispositif works. The institutional machinery produces interoperability, force generation, and operational coordination at a level no other security institution matches. The diagnosis of persistent incoherence coexists with this operative functionality — and that coexistence is precisely the structural condition the analysis identifies. The architecture fragments politically while functioning operationally. That is not a contradiction; it is the definition of managed decoupling under stress.

Under the iteration-dynamics frame established in C.2, this operative coherence carries a temporal qualifier. It describes what the architecture produces under current (peace-time, pre-Article-5) iteration windows. The dispositif works at peace-time tempo. Under acute time compression — a major Article 5 scenario, a high-tempo hybrid campaign, or simultaneous multi-theatre crises — the slow tempo that stabilises the operational cascade becomes the failure mode rather than the stabiliser. The architecture functions; the question is whether political fragmentation will, at some point, overwhelm the operational autopilot within a time window that the architecture itself cannot shorten.

Administrative throughput is a necessary but not sufficient condition for architectural health; the sufficient condition is delivery at self-defined performance categories, which C.7 applies.

## C.7 CORE TASK OUTPUT TEST

Does the architecture deliver on its own terms? This section tests NATO's output against its self-defined performance categories: the three core tasks of the 2022 Strategic Concept.<sup>217</sup> The test is methodologically independent of the dissent documentation (C.4, C.5): instead of counting dysfunction, it measures delivery against self-declared standards.

**Deterrence & Defence.** The output is not linearly “strengthened” or “eroded” but structurally split.

*Materially-operatively*, force posture has densified since 2022: Steadfast Defender 2024 (90,000 troops, 31 nations), Baltic and Eastern Sentry deployments, battlegroups scaled to brigade level, the Hague 5% commitment producing EUR 100bn in annual spending increase, Nordic-Baltic integration through Finland and Sweden's accession, NSATU Wiesbaden channelling USD 4bn+ to Ukraine.<sup>218</sup> These outputs are real and documented in C.6.

*On credibility*, testing frequency is rising. Latvia's SAB documents a four-fold increase in Russian sabotage operations in 2024;<sup>219</sup> maritime CUI incidents form a series across 2023–2025 (NewNew Polar Bear, Yi Peng 3, Eagle S, Fitburg);<sup>220</sup> the NAC characterised Russian airspace violations as “escalatory.”<sup>221</sup> A deterrence architecture that is tested more frequently and more brazenly faces a credibility question independent of its material inventory. The counter-test: if deterrence functions, testing rates decline rather than rise.

<sup>217</sup> NATO, “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept” (Madrid, 29 June 2022).

<sup>218</sup> SHAPE, “Steadfast Defender 2024”; NATO, Eastern Sentry Launch, 12 September 2025; NATO, Baltic Sentry Launch, 14 January 2025; NATO, “The Hague Summit Declaration,” 25 June 2025.

<sup>219</sup> SAB Latvia, Annual Report 2024 (Riga: Constitution Protection Bureau, 2025).

<sup>220</sup> Maritime CUI incidents 2023–2025.

<sup>221</sup> North Atlantic Council, “Statement on Russian Airspace Violations,” 23 September 2025 (nato.int).

*US conditionality* attacks extended deterrence from within. The NDS 2026 designates Europe as a reduced-priority theatre; the NSS 2025 deploys the “Atlas” motif; Trump’s 1 April 2026 “paper tiger” statement attacks the institution’s credibility as such.<sup>222</sup> Deterrence depends on adversary expectations about response chains; when Washington relativises the unconditionality of the commitment, the adversary’s perceived resolve declines.

*Hybrid permeability* remains high. The threshold for open military attack may be elevated; the threshold for hybrid, low-level, plausible-deniability actions is demonstrably insufficient. Baltic Sentry and Eastern Sentry are responses to this permeability, not evidence of prior full effectiveness.

**Intermediate finding — Deterrence:** material densification coexists with credibility erosion. The output is split, not linearly strengthened.

**Crisis Prevention & Management.** NATO remains the institutional reference frame but is losing its function as primary crisis coordinator.

The April 2026 Iran crisis confirmed the pattern previously established in the Ukraine coordination architecture: where the NAC consensus cycle cannot close within the available window, consequential coordination migrates to national capitals, bilateral formats, and ad hoc coalitions. In the Ukraine case, the US-led Ramstein Contact Group (UDCG, established April 2022, 57 nations, 31 meetings by November 2025) became the principal military-aid coordination mechanism — a format explicitly outside the NATO command structure.<sup>223</sup> Bilateral security guarantees (32 states under the G7 Vilnius framework of July 2023) and the Paris Coalition of the Willing (January 2026) further institutionalised the extra-NATO architecture.<sup>224</sup> NSATU Wiesbaden (December 2024) formalised within NATO what the ad hoc formats had carried for 2.5 years — itself evidence of the tempo gap.<sup>225</sup> In the Iran crisis, the same pattern recurred: no NAC activation despite kinetic engagement over Turkish airspace; coordination through E3, national capitals, and ad hoc maritime formats.<sup>226</sup> The United Kingdom acted as coalition coordinator rather than NATO-institutional mobiliser. The combination of Iran/Hormuz binding, Middle East engagement, Indo-Pacific prioritisation (NDS 2026), and political volatility in Washington constrains US crisis-management capacity; Europe cannot yet fully substitute.

The escalation of 7 April sharpened the pattern to its structural limit. Trump threatened on Truth Social that “a whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again” and set a deadline of 20:00 Washington time.<sup>227</sup> Approximately ninety minutes before the deadline,

<sup>222</sup> U.S. Department of War, “2026 National Defense Strategy,” 23 January 2026; The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2025); Donald Trump, interview with The Telegraph, 1 April 2026.

<sup>223</sup> U.S. Department of War, “Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III to Travel to Ramstein Air Base to Host 25th Ukraine Defense Contact Group,” <https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4023546/>. Ukraine Defense Contact Group: 57 participating nations, 31 meetings by November 2025. US-led, not NATO.

<sup>224</sup> G7, “Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine,” Vilnius, July 2023, <https://nato.usmission.gov/nato-summit-joint-declaration-of-g7-support-for-ukraine/>. UK Parliament, “Proposals for a Coalition of the Willing in Ukraine,” Research Briefing CBP-10412, 2026.

<sup>225</sup> NATO Secretary General Annual Report 2024: NSATU established December 2024, Wiesbaden.

<sup>226</sup> Mark Rutte, “No talk of triggering NATO’s Article 5,” 5 March 2026 (Economic Times). Bundesregierung, Bundestag, 4 March 2026. MAECI, Gulf Task Force, March 2026. Spain: Robles, JFC Naples, 26 March 2026.

<sup>227</sup> Donald Trump, Truth Social post, 7 April 2026, ca. 08:00 EST. Documented in: AP, “Trump warns a whole civilization will die tonight,” 7 April 2026, <https://apnews.com/0cc114201ad8f86518607a52322ef1af>. Amnesty International, “President Trump’s apocalyptic threats of large-scale civilian devastation demand urgent global action,” 7 April 2026, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/04/>.

a two-week ceasefire was agreed — mediated by Pakistan (PM Sharif, Field Marshal Munir), negotiated bilaterally between Trump/Witkoff and Iran's SNSC, with no NATO involvement at any stage.<sup>228</sup> SG Rutte met Trump at the White House only on 8 April — after the ceasefire was concluded. The NAC played no role in negotiation, mediation, or endorsement. The escalation chain within a single week — “paper tiger” (1 April), civilisational-destruction threat (7 April), bilateral ceasefire through a non-ally mediator (7–8 April) — documents a sequence in which the alliance's dominant member conducts existential-risk diplomacy entirely outside the institutional frame the alliance provides.

The general pattern: capitals, E3, Quint, bilateral formats, and now extra-alliance mediators absorb operative crisis management. NATO coordinates, advises, trains — but is not the sovereign first responder. This is the ceremonialisation pattern applied to crisis management: the institution remains the reference frame while performance migrates outward.

**Intermediate finding — Crisis Management:** declining centrality under continued institutional visibility.

**Cooperative Security.** The third core task exhibits qualitative narrowing.

The normative attractiveness on which cooperative security rests is eroding: the Values decoupling documented in C.4.4, the Habermasian Contradiction (C.12), and the announced Vance-Budapest visit as hegemonic alignment with the illiberal pole all constrain the alliance's capacity to project order beyond the membership. Partnerships exist formally; the order-building character is narrower, more reactive, geopolitically harder.

**Intermediate finding — Cooperative Security:** formally persisting, operatively narrowed.

**Synthesis.** Even under conservative bias correction (Scope Limitation 2: incoherence is more observable than coherence), all three official core tasks exhibit output losses. The ceremony finding is sharpened rather than weakened by this output test: the gap between official self-description and actual delivery performance grows on the alliance's *self-defined* performance categories. Consensus shifts from a mechanism of real coordination and output generation toward a ceremonial form of institutional self-confirmation.

---

<sup>228</sup> Iran Supreme National Security Council, “Declaration of Acceptance of the Islamabad-Mediated Ceasefire,” 8 April 2026, <https://wanaen.com/irans-supreme-national-security-council-statement-on-two-week-ceasefire/>. CBS News, “U.S. and Iran reach 2-week ceasefire,” 8 April 2026. Pakistan PM Sharif invited both delegations to Islamabad for 10 April 2026.



## C.8 THE DISPOSITIF PARADOX AS BLOCK-LEVEL DIAGNOSIS

*The institutional reproduction machinery simultaneously provides durability and prevents adaptation.*

This is a cross-dimensional structural property — and it is fundamentally a temporal mismatch: the maintenance mechanism operates at institutional tempo, the adaptation requirement operates at adversarial tempo, and the two tempi are incompatible within the current architecture (C.2).

The dispositif operates through four channels: STANAGs (1,200+ active standards),<sup>229</sup> the NDPP (five-stage, four-year cycle),<sup>230</sup> the classification regime (tiered knowledge access reproducing Lake's authority hierarchy),<sup>231</sup> and the socialisation pipeline (NDC Rome, NSO Oberammergau).<sup>232</sup>

**Durability side.** Berger/Luckmann institutionalisation has passed through habituation, objectivation, and sedimentation.<sup>233</sup> When Orbán de-identifies from the alliance, Hungarian military STANAG compliance continues (Zucker persistence at the procedural level).<sup>234</sup> DiMaggio/Powell's three isomorphism mechanisms — coercive (spending targets), mimetic (Cyber Command replication), normative (Professional Military Education as career gate) — drive convergence independently of political contestation.<sup>235</sup> North's complementary organisations mechanism identifies material persistence: defence industry consortia, NATO-dependent career structures, and think-tank ecosystems sustain the architecture beyond its original purpose.<sup>236</sup>

**Rigidity side.** The four-year NDPP cycle cannot accelerate to meet a threat that reconfigures cadres in months, reconstitutes forces at 234,000 despite combat losses, and cycles information campaigns in days.<sup>237,238,239</sup> Barnett/Finnemore's pathology cycle (mission creep to classification expansion to insulation from feedback to normalisation of deviance) compounds the problem.<sup>240</sup> Luhmann's functional differentiation framework adds a diagnostic layer: NATO's 360-degree scope expansion claims systemic completeness across all functional domains, but the operative system exhibits dimensional gaps.<sup>241</sup>

The paradox is structural. Abandoning the dispositif would destroy interoperability, institutional memory, and professional cohesion. Retaining it locks the alliance into an adaptation

<sup>229</sup> NATO Standardization Office, 1,200+ active STANAGs.

<sup>230</sup> NATO, "NATO Defence Planning Process," [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49202.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49202.htm).

<sup>231</sup> David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>232</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

<sup>233</sup> Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*.

<sup>234</sup> Lynne G. Zucker, "The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence," *American Sociological Review* 42, no. 5 (1977): 726–743.

<sup>235</sup> DiMaggio and Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited."

<sup>236</sup> Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>237</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Meeting on the Defence Industry Complex," [kremlin.ru](http://kremlin.ru). PONARS Eurasia, "Federal and Regional Dynamics of the Kremlin's New Cadre Strategy," 2024.

<sup>238</sup> ISW, *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment*, September 2025; Belfer Center, *Russian Force Reconstitution Assessment*, February 2026; ECFR, *Russia Assessment* 2025.

<sup>239</sup> BND, "Öffentliche Attribuierung: Russische Föderation hinter Storm-1516," LinkedIn, ~January 2026; BfV, *Election Interference Warning + Storm-1516 Germany Detail*, 2025; NewsGuard, *Storm-1516 targeting France/Germany Ukraine aid*, 2025–2026.

<sup>240</sup> Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules for the World*.

<sup>241</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984).

tempo that the adversary can systematically outpace. The tension between maintenance and adaptation is embedded in the consensus-based architecture itself — individual processes can accelerate, but the 32-member consensus floor constrains the system’s tempo as a whole. The dispositif provides durability by connecting fourteen of the analysis’s theoretical frameworks at the operative level — but this same connectivity means that the rigidity is not a single-point failure but a system property.<sup>242</sup>

## C.9 THE COUPLING MAP: HOW DIMENSIONAL FAILURES TRANSMIT

No dimension fails in isolation. Four primary transmission pathways propagate failure across the block.

**Pathway 1: Purpose → Values → Legitimacy (the normative cascade).** When five strategic cultures produce incompatible answers to “what for?”, the evaluative standard fractures because there is no common objective against which performance can be measured. The Thornton/Ocasio four-summit trajectory documents the evaluative grammar shifting from Security + Values to Market + Sovereignty.<sup>243,244,245</sup> The values fracture transmits directly to legitimacy: when the normative basis is hollow, legitimacy must rest on pragmatic delivery, which Suchman’s framework identifies as structurally less durable.<sup>246</sup>

**Pathway 2: Identity → Relationship → Resources (the structural cascade).** The identity redefinition by the dominant member (NDS 2026: “Model Allies” versus “Dependencies”; NSS 2025: “Atlas”) restructures the relationship from sovereign equality to graded hierarchy,<sup>247,248,249</sup> which restructures resource allocation from commons to club good.<sup>250,251</sup> The Morrow asymmetric exchange is repriced: the US demands more autonomy surrender while reducing the unconditional nature of the security guarantee.<sup>252</sup>

**Pathway 3: Competence ← Purpose → Resources (the capability paradox).** NATO possesses domain-specific competence and nominally adequate resources. But the absence of shared purpose prevents coordination across domains and across the temporal fracture. Allison/Zelikow’s Model III explains the mechanism: every decision is a bargaining resultant shaped by positional interests rather than a strategic output derived from shared purpose.<sup>253</sup> Resources without purpose produce material overextension; competence without purpose produces the capability paradox where the machinery runs but no one agrees on where it should go.

<sup>242</sup> The fourteen frameworks connected through the dispositif: Zucker (persistence), Berger and Luckmann (sedimentation), DiMaggio and Powell (isomorphism), North (path dependence), Foucault (C3 steering), Barnett and Finnemore (pathology), Allison and Zelikow (decision models), March and Olsen (garbage can), Janis (groupthink), Luhmann (differentiation), Meyer and Rowan (decoupling), Lake (hierarchy), Bourdieu (capital), Suchman (legitimacy).

<sup>243</sup> Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, *The Institutional Logics Perspective*.

<sup>244</sup> NATO, “The Hague Summit Declaration,” 25 June 2025.

<sup>245</sup> Colin S. Gray, “Strategic Culture as Context,” *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 49–69.

<sup>246</sup> Mark C. Suchman, “Managing Legitimacy,” *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 571–610.

<sup>247</sup> U.S. Department of War (formerly Department of Defense; secondary title “Department of War” restored September 2025 under the second Trump administration), “2026 National Defense Strategy,” 23 January 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

<sup>248</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2025.

<sup>249</sup> David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>250</sup> Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, “An Economic Theory of Alliances,” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 48, no. 3 (1966): 266–279.

<sup>251</sup> Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>252</sup> James D. Morrow, “Alliances and Asymmetry,” *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (1991): 904–933.

<sup>253</sup> Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*.

**Pathway 4: Legitimacy → Identity ← Values (the foundation cascade).** As legitimacy shifts from moral-cognitive to pragmatic-transactional, the identity claim (“community of democratic equals”) loses its normative anchor.<sup>254</sup> Simultaneously, values decoupling hollows the identity from the evaluative side.<sup>255,256</sup> Identity is squeezed between a legitimacy basis that no longer sustains normative claims and a values standard that no longer enforces normative content — the H.4 decoupling pattern.<sup>257</sup>

The **dispositif operates as a partial referential stabiliser**: STANAGs provide content for Competence/Resources without agreed Purpose; the socialisation pipeline provides Identity content even when national Identity diverges.<sup>258,259</sup> The stabilisation is partial — STANAGs address procedure; the question “what for?” remains outside their scope, as does Legitimacy’s moral mode.

Across all seven dimensions, the **sedimented layer maintains residual referential coherence** that the operative layer has lost. European allies’ architectures presuppose a consistent sedimented block (US guarantee + liberal values + sovereign equality + bureaucratic competence). This sedimented coherence masks operative fragmentation and makes the system brittle: when any sedimented assumption is tested, the referential chain across dimensions destabilises simultaneously.

## C.10 THE GREENLAND PRECEDENT AS STRUCTURAL TEST

The Greenland crisis (January 2025–January 2026) simultaneously tested every dimension.

*Identity.* The first instance of a member’s intelligence service identifying the alliance leader as a potential threat.<sup>260</sup>

*Relationship.* The dominant member exercised coercion against another member’s sovereign territory — Trump’s escalation arc from January 2025 rhetoric to January 2026 “one way or the other” doctrine, with SecDef Hegseth refusing to rule out military force.<sup>261</sup>

*Competence.* The crisis exposed the decision architecture’s inability to process intra-alliance threats — a garbage can problem (March/Olsen): a novel problem type entered the decision stream without a matching solution.<sup>262</sup>

*Values.* A direct breach of the sovereign equality norm, producing the Garfinkel breaching effect — the violation reveals what was taken for granted by exposing the expectation through its transgression.<sup>263</sup>

<sup>254</sup> Mark C. Suchman, “Managing Legitimacy,” *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 571–610.

<sup>255</sup> Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, *The Institutional Logics Perspective*.

<sup>256</sup> Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

<sup>257</sup> Martin Sauer, “Narrative Power: How Does Durable Coordinated Power Emerge?” (Preprint, 23 February 2026), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18745256>. C1–C3; Lemma; Bottleneck Theorem; R1–R4; T1–T4; D.3.2 Referential Dependence; H.4 Decoupling.

<sup>258</sup> Lynne G. Zucker, “The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence,” *American Sociological Review* 42, no. 5 (1977): 726–743.

<sup>259</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

<sup>260</sup> Danish Defence Intelligence Service (DDIS), *Intelligence Risk Assessment 2025* (Copenhagen: DDIS, 2025).

<sup>261</sup> Trump escalation arc January 2025–January 2026; SecDef Hegseth, NATO Defense Ministerial Brussels, 12 February 2025 (U.S. Mission to NATO transcript). UK Parliament: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10472/>.

<sup>262</sup> James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, “A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1972): 1–25.

<sup>263</sup> Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

*Resources.* The Davos de-escalation required concessions demonstrating resource allocation driven by coercion.<sup>264</sup>

*Purpose.* The alliance has no shared answer to “what for?” when the threat is internal.

*Legitimacy.* The NAC’s Article 1 warning confirms that legitimacy can be mobilised but only reactively and at the cost of exposing the fragility of the foundation; Weber’s legal-rational authority was invoked, but the necessity of invocation confirms operative hollowing.<sup>265,266</sup>

The Greenland precedent establishes that intra-alliance coercion is within the operative possibility space. This directly tests Deutsch’s foundational criterion for security community — dependable expectations of peaceful change — in a manner that de-escalation cannot reverse.<sup>267</sup> Compared to Suez (1956) and Iraq (2003), Greenland is more structurally significant because it forces allies to decide whether members remain inside the circle of mutual restraint, rather than whether an external war is an alliance affair.<sup>268</sup> The bypass mechanism that absorbed the 2003 Iraq crisis (Defence Planning Committee) no longer exists — the DPC was dissolved in 2010 — leaving the NAC as the sole decision body with no institutional compartmentalisation available.<sup>269</sup>

### C.11 THE ADVERSARY COHERENCE ASYMMETRY

R4 acquires its sharpest expression in cross-dimensional comparison. Russia’s coordination architecture in April 2026 populates all seven dimensions with singular content: singular purpose (civilisational struggle),<sup>270</sup> coherent identity (imperial restoration), hierarchical relationship (centralised command), whole-of-government competence (cadre reorganisation under Belousov).<sup>271</sup>

Resources and legitimacy complete the picture: wartime resource conversion (EUR 202bn real spending per BND, 38% of federal budget, +234,000 personnel),<sup>272,273,274</sup> counter-legitimacy through alternative institutional architecture (BRICS, SCO, Greater Eurasian Partnership).<sup>275</sup>

The material comparison favours NATO overwhelmingly. But R1 establishes that the architecture cannot be reduced to material capability. The architectural comparison favours Russia on coherence: singular purpose versus five competing purposes; centralised authority versus consensus paralysis; weeks-tempo adaptation versus years-tempo institutional cycles. This

<sup>264</sup> Davos framework, 21 January 2026. NATO official.

<sup>265</sup> Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922); English: *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>266</sup> North Atlantic Council, statement on Greenland sovereignty, January 2026: European allies warned that use of force against a member’s territory would constitute an Article 1 violation.

<sup>267</sup> Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

<sup>268</sup> NATO, “Report of the Committee of Three” (Suez, 1956). NATO, “Decision Sheet of the Defence Planning Committee,” 16 February 2003; “NATO to deploy defensive assistance to Turkey,” 19 February 2003. DPC dissolved 2010.

<sup>269</sup> NATO, “Decision Sheet of the Defence Planning Committee,” 16 February 2003. NATO, “NATO to deploy defensive assistance to Turkey,” 19 February 2003. DPC dissolved 2010.

<sup>270</sup> Vladimir Putin, address at Valdai International Discussion Club, 2024.

<sup>271</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Meeting on the Defence Industry Complex,” kremlin.ru. PONARS Eurasia, “Federal and Regional Dynamics of the Kremlin’s New Cadre Strategy,” 2024.

<sup>272</sup> Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), assessment of Russian military spending, 2024.

<sup>273</sup> SIPRI, “Preparing for a Fourth Year of War,” 2025. RAND, “The Russian Federal Budget 2025–2027.” OSW, “Russia’s 2026 budget.”

<sup>274</sup> ISW, Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 2025; Belfer Center, Russian Force Reconstitution Assessment, February 2026; ECFR, Russia Assessment 2025.

<sup>275</sup> Sergei Lavrov, interview with TV BRICS, 9 February 2026 (TASS): “Putin’s initiative for Eurasian security architecture is gaining momentum.” BRICS, SCO, and Greater Eurasian Partnership as counter-legitimacy architecture.

coherence advantage can be converted into operational effect at three documented points of NATO's structural weakness: the temporal fracture between Eastern and Western threat horizons, the purpose seams between engagement and non-involvement, and the values gap between declared liberalism and operative transactionalism.<sup>276,277,278</sup>

This asymmetry does not mean Russia is stronger. It means Russia is architecturally coherent where NATO is architecturally incoherent. The durability modes differ as established in C.1 (R4): NATO erodes slowly through political fragmentation; Russia ruptures suddenly through regime disruption. The 2026 configuration favours the architecture that can exploit seams over the architecture that possesses more material.

## C.12 THE HABERMASIAN CONTRADICTION AS STRUCTURAL CONDITION

Habermas's legitimation crisis framework (Class 1: mechanism theory — describes how legitimation fails, not what legitimate order should look like) identifies functional contradictions that cannot be resolved within the existing institutional structure because the system's operative requirements directly undermine the normative principles on which its legitimacy rests.<sup>279</sup>

Three contradictions operate simultaneously:

*Accommodation vs enforcement.* The alliance must simultaneously *accommodate* members with authoritarian trajectories (Hungary, Turkey) to preserve consensus and *enforce* democratic standards to maintain moral legitimacy — a contradiction documented through Bourdieu's field analysis showing that security capital overrides normative capital.<sup>280,281,282</sup>

*Unconditional vs conditional security.* The alliance must simultaneously *deliver* unconditional security (Article 5) and *condition* that security on spending performance (NDS 2026, Colby).<sup>283,284,285</sup>

*Projected unity vs tolerated dissent.* The alliance must simultaneously *project* unity and *tolerate* documented dissent incidents.<sup>286</sup>

<sup>276</sup> BND, "Öffentliche Attribuierung: Russische Föderation hinter Storm-1516," LinkedIn, ~January 2026; BfV, Election Interference Warning + Storm-1516 Germany Detail, 2025; NewsGuard, Storm-1516 targeting France/Germany Ukraine aid, 2025--2026.

<sup>277</sup> Council of the European Union, "Robust Security Guarantees for a Solid and Lasting Peace in Ukraine --- Statement of the Coalition of the Willing issued by France," 6 January 2026.

<sup>278</sup> Slovakia deepened dissent, October 2025--February 2026. U.S. State Department, "Secretary Rubio and Slovak PM Fico Joint Press Availability," 13 February 2026.

<sup>279</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973). Distinct from Habermas's discourse ethics (1983), which would operate as Class 2.

<sup>280</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241--258.

<sup>281</sup> Hungarian Government, public opposition to Ukraine NATO accession, June 2025. Official government portal.

<sup>282</sup> Turkey: FM Fidan, Bloomberg TV interview, 21 February 2025; Turkish MoD, Reuters, 21 August 2025; Turkey blocking Israel NATO exercise participation, Turkish Minute, 12 March 2025.

<sup>283</sup> North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, 4 April 1949.

<sup>284</sup> U.S. Department of War (formerly Department of Defense; secondary title "Department of War" restored September 2025 under the second Trump administration), "2026 National Defense Strategy," 23 January 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

<sup>285</sup> Elbridge Colby, "NATO Ministerial Remarks," February 2026.

<sup>286</sup> Compiled from NATO communiqués, member-state statements, and verified press reporting. Sixteen documented dissent/opt-out/block incidents spanning spending, Ukraine-path, and operational axes. Individual public sources cited at respective analytical locations.

The Vance-Budapest visit (7 April 2026) escalated the first contradiction from passive tolerance to active hegemonic sponsorship of the illiberal pole.<sup>287</sup> Vance stated he wanted to “help as much as I possibly can” with Orbán’s re-election, called him a “wise statesman,” declared “Viktor Orbán will win this election,” and attacked the EU for “one of the worst examples of foreign election interference I’ve ever seen.” At a subsequent rally at MTK Sportpark, Vance told supporters: “We have got to get Viktor Orbán re-elected” and “the bureaucrats in Brussels should not be listened to — listen to your hearts, listen to your souls, and listen to the sovereignty of the Hungarian people.” Trump endorsed Orbán via live phone call into the rally: “I love Hungary and I love that Viktor... he’s a fantastic man.”<sup>288</sup> On 8 April, Vance extended the anti-EU posture to energy policy, criticising allies who reduced Russian gas dependence. The dominant member does not merely tolerate but visibly campaigns for the alliance’s least liberal member during an election, while simultaneously attacking the institutional framework the alliance operates within. The contradiction ceases to be structural tension and becomes active self-undermining of the normative basis. [Confidence: High — overt campaign support documented through joint press conference, public rally, presidential endorsement call, and two-day anti-EU rhetoric.]

These are not policy tensions resolvable through compromise but architectural features of a 32-member consensus alliance whose dominant member has redefined the terms of participation.

### C.13 THE TWO-VECTOR EXTERNAL CONTESTATION

External values contestation operates through two distinct adversary approaches producing complementary dimensional pressure without requiring formal coordination.

Russia targets Values and Purpose directly: Putin’s Valdai framing of Western liberalism as “extreme intolerance and aggression”; Storm-1516 campaigns targeting democratic credibility; a “chaos-centric” approach destabilising values coherence without establishing a competing positive vision.<sup>289,290</sup> China targets Resources, Competence, and Legitimacy through the Three Warfares doctrine — a “systemic-centric” approach building alternative institutional architecture.<sup>291</sup>

The distinction is corroborated by four independent sources: the NATO Vilnius Summit Communiqué identifying PRC as a “systemic challenge”;<sup>292</sup> BfV documentation of Chinese cyberespionage targeting institutional competence;<sup>293</sup> maritime CUI incidents operating on the

<sup>287</sup> JD Vance, joint press conference with Viktor Orbán, Budapest, 7 April 2026 (C-SPAN video, <https://www.c-span.org/event/news-conference/vp-vance-hungarian-pm-viktor-orban-hold-press-conference/441900>). AP, “Vance says he’s here to help Orbán’s election campaign,” 7 April 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/jd-vance-hungary-orban-election-campaign-08e0929e9c8b3ae4302ae4e8c0393d5e>. Reuters, “Key Quotes from Vance and Orbán’s News Conference,” 7 April 2026.

<sup>288</sup> C-SPAN, “Vice President Vance Delivers Remarks on U.S.-Hungary Relations,” 7 April 2026 (rally video), <https://www.c-span.org/program/public-affairs-event/vice-president-vance-delivers-remarks-on-us-hungary-relations/676926>. AP video, “Vance puts Trump on speakerphone during speech to Orbán rally in Budapest,” 7 April 2026. The Guardian live blog, 8 April 2026.

<sup>289</sup> Vladimir Putin, address at Valdai International Discussion Club, 2024.

<sup>290</sup> BND, “Öffentliche Attribuierung: Russische Föderation hinter Storm-1516,” LinkedIn, ~January 2026; BfV, Election Interference Warning + Storm-1516 Germany Detail, 2025; NewsGuard, Storm-1516 targeting France/Germany Ukraine aid, 2025–2026.

<sup>291</sup> Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), Craig Singleton, testimony before House Foreign Affairs Committee on Chinese information operations; NATO StratCom COE, Riga.

<sup>292</sup> NATO, “Vilnius Summit Communiqué,” 11 July 2023.

<sup>293</sup> BfV, “Cyber Insight: The i-Soon Leaks,” 3 parts, August 2024.

Resources axis;<sup>294</sup> HCSS analysis distinguishing Chinese “structural-institutional” from Russian “disruption-centric” methodologies.<sup>295</sup>

The complementarity matters because it produces simultaneous dimensional pressure on different axes. The internal incoherence — the Thornton/Ocasio logic shift from values to market metrics — provides the material for external exploitation. The adversary’s role is publication rather than fabrication — the contradiction is already present.

A third mechanism operates beneath the two adversary vectors: where the alliance’s own narrative exhibits T3 violations, competing narratives that achieve higher dimensional coherence on the same axes occupy the space the incoherence vacates. This is a structural consequence of dimensional vacancy — the coordination pressure the Lemma identifies is resolved not by the alliance but by narratives that populate the vacant dimensions more completely.

Anti-institutional sovereigntism, anti-Zionist solidarity, anti-Western civilisational framing, deindustrialisation narratives, “NATO as aggressor” revisionism, EU overregulation critiques, and climate-versus-defence framing each populate different dimensional subsets; each achieves internal coherence that NATO’s fractured position on the same axes does not match. These narratives span the entire ideological spectrum — left, right, pacifist, sovereigntist, progressive, traditionalist. Their ideological diversity is itself evidence that the vulnerability is architectural rather than ideological: the dimensional vacancies attract narrative competition from every direction because the vacancies are structural, not partisan. Each of these narratives is adversary-amplifiable because it targets the same dimensional seams that adversary contestation exploits. The amplification requires no coordination — structural compatibility suffices.

The April 2026 Iran refusals illustrate the resulting dimensional overdetermination. The same operative outcome (non-participation) is simultaneously driven by strategic disagreement (Purpose), anti-hegemonic Relationship erosion where the current US leadership makes cooperation domestically toxic (Identity/Relationship), domestic pressure recoding Iran engagement as complicity in a wider Middle Eastern conflict (Values), and sovereigntist positioning (Identity/Legitimacy). No single narrative is causal; the dimensional overlay — multiple competing narratives reinforcing the same operational conclusion through different dimensional pathways — produces the refusal.

The subsea infrastructure attacks (Eagle S, Yi Peng 3, NewNew Polar Bear) operate on the same structural logic at the material level: they target the physical interdependence (C2) that the coordination architecture presupposes, converting infrastructure vulnerability into coercive leverage on the Resources dimension.<sup>296</sup>

The operative mapping of the narrative contestation landscape — which narratives target which dimensions with what amplitude, and how adversary amplification interacts with domestic generation — requires instruments beyond the scope of this analysis.

<sup>294</sup> Maritime CUI incidents: NewNew Polar Bear (Oct 2023, Balticconnector pipeline), Yi Peng 3 (Nov 2024, BCS East-West Interlink), Eagle S (Dec 2024, Estlink 2), Fitburg (Dec 2025, Helsinki-Tallinn cable). CBS News; Euronews; The Register.

<sup>295</sup> HCSS, “Responding to China’s Hybrid Threats,” January 2026.

<sup>296</sup> Maritime CUI incidents: NewNew Polar Bear (Oct 2023, Balticconnector pipeline), Yi Peng 3 (Nov 2024, BCS East-West Interlink), Eagle S (Dec 2024, Estlink 2), Fitburg (Dec 2025, Helsinki-Tallinn cable). CBS News; Euronews; The Register.



## C.14 COGNITIVE-NARRATIVE STRUCTURAL DEFICIT

NATO operates in the narrative-cognitive space not merely slower than the adversary but outside the adversary's effect cycle. The deficit is structural, not operational: wrong temporal position, wrong response mode, wrong effect logic.

**Systemic miscalibration.** NATO is organised post-impact. Primary responsibility for responding to hybrid/informational attacks lies with the affected state — an in-built delay in a space where attacks are cross-border, fast, attribution-difficult, and societally diffuse. ACT formulates that initiative in the cognitive space must first be “won” — an implicit admission that it is not held.<sup>297</sup> The counter-information approach was jointly approved only in 2024, while Russia and China have operated in this space for years. The OODA asymmetry (Boyd, C.2) applies here directly: the 32-member consensus cycle structures NATO's decision tempo; the adversary cycles information campaigns in days (Storm-1516).<sup>298</sup>

The finding is not underperformance but wrong temporal position, wrong response mode, wrong effect logic. NATO produces attribution, resilience, responsibility delegation, and concept development — answers to the wrong conflict type.

**Cross-cutting attack on all three core tasks.** The cognitive-narrative space is not a sub-problem of a single dimension. When adversaries penetrate perception, interpretation, political delay, and societal cohesion, they directly damage all three official core tasks:

*Deterrence:* adversary risk appetite rises through credibility and perception manipulation.

*Crisis Management:* shared situational assessment is slowed or distorted; response capacity fragments.

*Cooperative Security:* trust, partner commitment, and normative attractiveness are undermined.

**Negative relative dynamic.** The gap is not only widening; it is accelerating. Adversary effect is increasing: SAB Latvia documents a four-fold sabotage increase in 2024; Storm-1516 campaigns target France and Germany; maritime CUI incidents form a series across 2023–2025; Russian force reconstitution adds +234,000 personnel despite combat losses.<sup>299</sup>

NATO's response: concept development (CogWar MC-endorsed November 2025), IEA still scaling (48+18 new positions), StratCom COE advisory.<sup>300</sup> This is the vocabulary of a system under construction, not of a system that commands the space. When adversary effect increases despite NATO's reported progress, the evidence points to systemic miscalibration of the response mode itself rather than insufficient execution.

**Sender amplification mechanism.** In affectively fragmented meaning spaces, the sender is itself part of the effect mechanism. Where the H2-spine (the narrative coordination layer) is not pre-occupied, every downstream state or alliance-official intervention enters a space

<sup>297</sup> SACEUR Grynkeiwich, “Cognitive Campaign and Decisive Hour,” 2025–2026; ACT CogWar concept MC-endorsed November 2025.

<sup>298</sup> BND, “Öffentliche Attribuierung: Russische Föderation hinter Storm-1516,” LinkedIn, January 2026; BfV, “Election Interference Warning,” Storm-1516 Germany detail, 2025.

<sup>299</sup> SAB Latvia, Annual Report 2024 (Riga: Constitution Protection Bureau, 2025); ISW, Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 2025; Belfer Center, Russian Force Reconstitution Assessment, February 2026.

<sup>300</sup> NATO Allied Command Transformation, IEA Capability Programme Plan (Madrid Summit mandate, 2022–). ACT official programme documentation.

already structured by adversary framing, in which the official sender is coded as part of the problem.<sup>301</sup>

When a sender already coded negatively is deployed as the primary carrier of the response, the response can amplify rather than counter the adversary's effect: the original adversary frame is confirmed; distrust of the sender deepens; the intervention itself serves as further evidence for the claimed manipulation; affective fragmentation is reproduced or intensified. Canonical support: reactance theory (Brehm 1966), Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty/Cacioppo 1986), source credibility (Hovland/Janis/Kelley 1953), motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990), affective polarisation (Iyengar/Westwood 2015), identity-protective cognition (Kahan et al. 2012).<sup>302</sup>

In this space, "more response" is not automatically "better effect." The official sender can deepen the loss. This makes the ceremony finding not only stronger but structurally more consequential.

**Empirical demonstration: Storm-1516 against France and Germany (2025–2026).** The Russian influence operation Storm-1516 provides the minimal empirical case for the sender-amplification chain. The operation employs an industrialised five-phase architecture (preparation, distribution, content laundering through 290+ fabricated news sites, bot-network amplification, relay through state media), generating approximately 244 million views on X in 2025 with 30+ identified false claims targeting French and German leadership.<sup>303</sup> Two attribution waves — the BfV election-interference warning (2025),<sup>304</sup> whose recoding within right-wing and pro-Russian Telegram channels CORRECTIV documented on 23 January 2025,<sup>305</sup> and the BND public attribution on LinkedIn (December 2025 / January 2026)<sup>306</sup> — constitute the sender-amplification trigger: across both waves, the attribution was recoded not as resolution but as confirmation that "the intelligence services are suppressing the truth" — the original false claims gained viral momentum precisely *because* the state intervened. The trust environment structurally predetermines this outcome: government satisfaction stood at 14% in April 2026 (Infratest dimap); 81% of German respondents reported reluctance to trust persons with different values or information sources (Edelman Trust Barometer 2026); in France, 6% believed the next generation would be better off.<sup>307</sup> The OODA timing confirms the structural asymmetry: adversary launch to viral saturation operates in hours; state observation, verification, political coordination, and public attribution require weeks to months. By the time the official response arrives, cognitive orientation of the target audience is already framed by the adversary. The case demonstrates that in affectively fragmented spaces with low institutional

<sup>301</sup> Martin Sauer, "Narrative Power: How Does Durable Coordinated Power Emerge?" (Preprint, 23 February 2026), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18745256>. H2-spine logic.

<sup>302</sup> Jack W. Brehm, *A Theory of Psychological Reactance* (New York: Academic Press, 1966); Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, *Communication and Persuasion* (New York: Springer, 1986); Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, and Harold H. Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953); Ziva Kunda, "The Case for Motivated Reasoning," *Psychological Bulletin* 108, no. 3 (1990): 480–498; Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines," *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 3 (2015): 690–707; Dan M. Kahan et al., "'They Saw a Protest': Cognitive Illiberalism and the Speech-Conduct Distinction," *Stanford Law Review* 64 (2012): 851–906.

<sup>303</sup> NewsGuard, "Russian Influence Campaign Shifts to Target Ukraine's European Allies Funding its Defense," 2025–2026 (Special Report). VIGINUM, "Storm-1516 Report," February and May 2025, documenting 77 operations. European Policy Centre (EPC), "Storm-1516: A Wake-Up Call for Europe's Cognitive Defence," 2026.

<sup>304</sup> BfV, "Gefährdung der Bundestagswahl durch unzulässige ausländische Einflussnahme," 2025.

<sup>305</sup> CORRECTIV, "Einflussoperation enttarnt: Russland greift in deutschen Wahlkampf ein," 23 January 2025.

<sup>306</sup> BND, "Öffentliche Attribuierung: Russische Föderation hinter Storm-1516," LinkedIn, December 2025 / January 2026.

<sup>307</sup> Infratest dimap, "ARD-DeutschlandTREND," April 2026; Edelman, "2026 Trust Barometer: Insularity," January 2026.

trust, the state's corrective intervention functions as an amplifier within the adversary's effect chain rather than as a countermeasure.

**Damage done is damage banked.** In the cognitive-narrative space, a realised adversary gain — a placed interpretive frame, a produced trust breach, an imposed uncertainty — remains banked in the system. Subsequent response does not restore the lost position; it can at best interrupt further effect.

This applies specifically to *affective* positions (distrust, enemy-image deepening, identity-based rejection), not to cognitive propositions in the narrow sense. Affective positions follow different persistence rules than cognitive misconceptions: cognitive positions are correctable through facts; affective positions are frequently not revised but hardened by facts (backfire effect; identity-protective cognition per Kahan et al. 2012).

If NATO and member states continue to lose ground in the cognitive-narrative space without producing counter-gains, the loss is cumulative and systemically self-reinforcing. What is demonstrated is not failure as such but the logic of a progressive defeat on time — as long as the alliance only reacts downstream in adversary-occupied space and gains no cognitive initiative of its own.

The more the alliance measures its improvement by activities, formats, and response architecture while the adversary gains real effect, the more institutional activity substitutes for strategic success. In the cognitive-narrative space, NATO does not manage the erosion; it loses the space progressively. The ceremony finding sharpens from mere decoupling to systemic miscalibration under progressive positional loss.

### C.15 CROSS-DIMENSIONAL DEPENDENCIES (D.3.2)

The NP derivation establishes referential dependence: each dimension, in isolation, is referentially empty; all co-constitute through C3-iteration under coordination pressure.<sup>308</sup> Applied to NATO, the referential structure is **asymmetrically stressed**, clustering around two hub dimensions: Purpose (most contested) and Values (most decoupled).

The dispositif provides partial referential stability for the operational cascade (Relationship → Competence → Resources) even when Purpose, Values, and Identity fragment. STANAGs address procedure; the question “what for?” remains outside their scope, as does Legitimacy's moral mode.

The sedimented layer maintains residual referential coherence that the operative layer has lost. This coherence masks operative fragmentation and creates brittle failure modes: when any sedimented assumption is tested, the referential chain across dimensions transmits the shock simultaneously. The Greenland crisis demonstrated this: a sovereignty test (Identity) simultaneously stressed Legitimacy, Relationship, and Values. [Confidence: Medium-High — mechanism grounded in D.3.2; specific transmission observed in one case; generalisation requires further calibration.]

<sup>308</sup> Martin Sauer, “Narrative Power: How Does Durable Coordinated Power Emerge?” (Preprint, 23 February 2026), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18745256>. C1–C3; Lemma; Bottleneck Theorem; R1–R4; T1–T4; D.3.2 Referential Dependence; H.4 Decoupling.



The forensic diagnosis is now complete. Chapter D translates these findings into forward projections: thirteen condition-consequence statements that identify structural consequences already entailed by the current configuration. They are not predictions but forensic extrapolations — each names a condition that obtains and traces the consequence through the mechanisms documented in C.

## D DECISION ARCHITECTURE

Thirteen condition-consequence statements drawn from the Chapter C findings. Each names a condition already present in the current architecture and the structural consequence that follows if the condition holds. These are forensic forward projections, not predictions. Eight primary statements carry the structural argument; five subsidiary statements specify conditions within the primary ones and are summarised in tabular form at the end of this chapter.

### Foundational Architecture

**D.1.** *If the SC 2022 / NDS 2026 contradiction remains unresolved, then the purpose dimension remains structurally incomplete, and the coordination architecture cannot generate a Theory of Victory. The five strategic culture clusters will continue producing divergent answers to “what for?” because the institutional architecture provides no arbitration mechanism.*<sup>309,310,311</sup>

**D.2.** *If the 5% spending target is achieved in nominal terms without resolving the three structural chokepoints (personnel readiness, ammunition production rates, procurement integration), then the spending-to-capability conversion gap widens, producing the appearance of resource adequacy alongside persistent capability undersupply.*<sup>312,313</sup>

**D.3.** *If the legitimacy basis continues to shift from moral-cognitive to pragmatic-transactional without reconstruction of normative commitment, then the alliance’s durability becomes contingent on continuous, visible delivery — and the first major delivery failure will produce disproportionate legitimacy collapse because no normative reserve exists to buffer it.*

The erosion trajectory (surge to friction to defensive pragmatism to acute erosion) is at Phase 4; the April 2026 sequence — “paper tiger” (1 April), civilisational-destruction threat without institutional consultation (7 April), bilateral ceasefire through a non-ally mediator (7–8 April) — constitutes Phase 5 (dissolution signalling) whose persistence depends on whether rhetoric is followed by institutional acts.<sup>314,315,316</sup> [Confidence: High on Phase 4; Medium-High on Phase 5 — the escalation sequence from institutional delegitimisation through existential-threat rhetoric to extra-institutional crisis resolution is documented, though durability of Phase 5 remains to be tested.]

<sup>309</sup> NATO, “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept” (Madrid, 29 June 2022).

<sup>310</sup> U.S. Department of War, “2026 National Defense Strategy,” 23 January 2026.

<sup>311</sup> Colin S. Gray, “Strategic Culture as Context,” *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 49–69.

<sup>312</sup> NATO, “The Hague Summit Declaration,” 25 June 2025.

<sup>313</sup> NATO, “Defence Expenditures and NATO’s 5% Commitment,” 18 December 2025; IISS, *The Military Balance 2026* (London: Routledge, 2026).

<sup>314</sup> Mark C. Suchman, “Managing Legitimacy,” *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 571–610.

<sup>315</sup> Pew Research Center, “NATO Viewed Favorably Across 13 Member Nations,” 23 June 2025.

<sup>316</sup> Donald Trump, interview with *The Telegraph*, 1 April 2026 (“paper tiger”); *Truth Social*, 7 April 2026 (“A whole civilization will die tonight”); two-week ceasefire via Pakistan mediation, 7–8 April 2026.



## Temporal Dynamics

**D.4.** *If managed decoupling absorbs further structural shocks, then the carrying capacity limit approaches without ex ante visibility.*

Historical comparison indicates that the system can absorb severe stress when crises are compartmentalisable and a minimal defensive core remains intact (Suez 1956, Iraq 2003). But the DPC — the institutional bypass that preserved the alliance during the Iraq split — was dissolved in 2010. The system may transition from managed decoupling to unmanaged collapse on a timeline determined by the next shock's intensity. Institutional stress does not reset between episodes; it accumulates.<sup>317,318</sup> [Confidence: Medium-High.]

**D.6.** *If institutional persistence continues to be treated as evidence of institutional health rather than as a distinct phenomenon from institutional adaptation, then the tempo deficit compounds as the iteration-dynamics meta-constraint (C.2): every forced decision before coherence production completes exposes dimensional incoherence, which fragments authority, which shortens the next coherence-production window.*

Wallander/Keohane's finding that the architecture has historically survived purpose changes does not guarantee it survives tempo changes — the Cold War adversary operated at comparable institutional speed; the current adversary does not. The OODA differential (Boyd) is structural, not correctable through marginal process acceleration.<sup>319,320,321</sup>

## Operational Fragmentation

**D.10.** *If bilateral hedging proliferates (21 EU-Ukraine security treaties, UK-Germany Trinity House, France-Poland bilateral, EDIP/SAFE, Ukraine Gulf defence agreements), then the multilateral framework loses its monopoly on security provision — NATO becomes one node in a polycentric security architecture.*<sup>322,323,324</sup>

**D.12.** *If European allies shift procurement toward sovereign, modular capabilities designed for hedging against hegemonic conditionality (EDIP/SAFE industrial autonomy, national champion systems, reduced F-35 dependency),<sup>325</sup> then the operational cascade (Relationship → Competence → Resources) — currently the most stable part of the architecture, held together by the dispositif's procedural interoperability — destabilises from the Resources end.*

T3 (Multimodal Synchronisation) requires that capabilities remain interoperable across domains and across allies; hedging-driven procurement optimises for national autonomy, not

<sup>317</sup> John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 2 (1977): 340–363.

<sup>318</sup> NATO, "Report of the Committee of Three" (Suez, 1956). NATO, "Decision Sheet of the Defence Planning Committee," 16 February 2003. DPC dissolved 2010.

<sup>319</sup> Lynne G. Zucker, "The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence," *American Sociological Review* 42, no. 5 (1977): 726–743.

<sup>320</sup> Celeste A. Wallander and Robert O. Keohane, "Risk, Threat, and Security Institutions," in *Imperfect Unions*, ed. Helga Haftendorn, Robert O. Keohane, and Celeste A. Wallander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21–47.

<sup>321</sup> John R. Boyd, "A Discourse on Winning and Losing," briefing materials, 1976–1996; OODA loop formulation as presented in "Patterns of Conflict" (1986).

<sup>322</sup> Council of the European Union, "Robust Security Guarantees for a Solid and Lasting Peace in Ukraine," 6 January 2026.

<sup>323</sup> European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP), December 2025. SAFE: EUR 150bn.

<sup>324</sup> President of Ukraine official readouts, 27–30 March 2026: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, UAE defence cooperation agreements.

<sup>325</sup> European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP), December 2025. SAFE: EUR 150bn.



for cross-alliance synchronisation.<sup>326</sup> The structural tension is that the same transactional logic that drives hedging (rational response to conditional security guarantees) undermines the interoperability on which conventional deterrence against Russia depends. Hedging and deterrence pull the Resources dimension in opposite directions – reconciliation requires a mechanism the architecture has yet to produce.<sup>327</sup>

**D.13.** *If* competing narratives continue to achieve higher dimensional coherence than the alliance's own on contested axes (Values, Purpose, Legitimacy), *then* the alliance loses the narrative competition through self-generated dimensional vacancy rather than through adversary superiority. Strategic communication addresses symptoms; the vacancy persists as long as the T3 violations that generate it persist. The adversary's role reduces to amplification of a pre-existing condition – and amplification at scale requires less capability than fabrication.<sup>328</sup>

**Five subsidiary projections** specify conditions within the eight primary statements. Each elaborates a mechanism already identified above; they are listed separately to maintain the primary argument's structural clarity.

**Table D.1:** *Subsidiary condition-consequence projections.*

Ref.	Condition	Consequence
D.5	Eastern/Western temporal fracture unbridged	Force posture investments optimised for a timeframe the political architecture cannot support (specifies D.4)
D.7	Greenland precedent establishes tolerated intra-alliance coercion	Sedimented expectation of mutual restraint erodes progressively [Medium] (specifies D.3)
D.8	Values standard completes transition to market-transactional	External contestation operates on internally validated material (specifies D.13)
D.9	Ideological power source for 5% reallocation remains unfulfilled	Fiscal targets politically unsustainable; normalisation-of-deviance cycle repeats (specifies D.2)
D.11	Out-of-area contingencies produce fragmented participation	Purpose fragmentation manifests operatively before any Art. 5 test (specifies D.10)

<sup>326</sup> David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>327</sup> Martin Sauer, "Narrative Power: How Does Durable Coordinated Power Emerge?" (Preprint, 23 February 2026), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18745256>.

<sup>328</sup> Martin Sauer, "Narrative Power: How Does Durable Coordinated Power Emerge?" (Preprint, 23 February 2026), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18745256>.

## E EXHIBITS

Nine forensic exhibits condense the analytical findings of Chapter C into reference format. Each exhibit stands alone and can be consulted individually; together they document the structural evidence base for the diagnosis. E.1 grounds the three-layer configuration conflict; E.2–E.4 summarise the dimensional and cross-dimensional results; E.5–E.7 provide quantitative anchors; E.8 calibrates the current moment against historical stress tests; E.9 documents the iteration-window asymmetry.

### E.1 THREE-LAYER CONFIGURATION CONFLICT

The architectural frame of the diagnosis: three layers with distinct content, adaptation tempi, and primary sources. Supports C.3 and Finding 1.

**Table E.1:** *Three-layer configuration conflict: declared, operative, sedimented.*

Layer	Content	Tempo	Primary Sources
<b>Declared</b>	Values community, sovereign equals, indivisible security, full-spectrum competence, 5% commitment, three core tasks, triple legitimacy <sup>329</sup>	Static (summit cycles)	WashTreaty 1949; SC 2022; Hague 2025
<b>Operative</b>	US hierarchy, <sup>330</sup> regional fragmentation, tempo deficit, <sup>331</sup> market metrics, <sup>332</sup> spending-capability gap, <sup>333</sup> five divergent purposes, <sup>334</sup> pragmatic-transactional legitimacy, <sup>335</sup> bilateral hedging (CoW, EDIP/SAFE) <sup>336</sup>	Dynamic (real-time)	NDS 2026; Colby Feb 2026; IISS 2026; Pew 2025; NATO communiqués and member-state statements
<b>Sedimented</b>	US guarantee as axiom, liberal order as default, <sup>337</sup> sovereign equality as ground norm, <sup>338</sup> bureaucratic competence as durability machine <sup>339</sup>	Deep-structural (decades)	Institutional practice 1949–2022; Reuters/Politico reporting on Greenland

### E.2 DIMENSIONAL RISK HIERARCHY

Per-dimension T3 status and decoupling classification, ordered by decoupling severity. Purpose and Values sit at foundational risk. Supports C.4.



**Table E.2:** *Dimensional risk hierarchy: T3 status and decoupling type across the seven-dimensional block.*

Dimension	T3 Status	Decoupling Type	Primary Risk
Purpose	VIOLATED (foundational)	Erosive	Five divergent cultures, SC 2022 / NDS 2026 contradiction
Values	VIOLATED (max amplitude)	Erosive (at threshold)	Liberal-democratic declared, market-transactional operative
Legitimacy	VIOLATED (moral-cognitive)	Erosive	Shift from durable to fragile configuration
Identity	VIOLATED	Approaching erosive	Greenland precedent, US redefinition, “paper tiger”
Relationship	VIOLATED (all pairs)	Mixed (functional + erosive)	Hierarchy + abandonment/entrapment
Resources	PARTIALLY VIOLATED	Functional	Conversion gap (spending ≠ capability)
Competence	VIOLATED (synchronisation)	Functional	Tempo deficit, cross-domain gap

### E.3 TRANSMISSION PATHWAYS

The four pathways through which dimensional failure propagates across the block (per C.9). Each describes how failure on one dimension transmits to adjacent dimensions through referential dependence (D.3.2).

**Table E.3:** *The four transmission pathways through which dimensional failure propagates.*

Pathway	Path	Status
Normative cascade	Purpose → Values → Legitimacy	Active — evaluative grammar shifts from normative to transactional; legitimacy forced onto pragmatic delivery
Structural cascade	Identity → Relationship → Resources	Active — US identity redefinition restructures hierarchy from sovereign equality to graded dependence; resource allocation repriced
Capability paradox	Competence ← Purpose → Resources	Active — shared purpose absent; resources produce overextension, competence runs without direction
Foundation cascade	Legitimacy → Identity ← Values	Active — identity squeezed between eroded legitimacy base and hollowed values standard (H.4 pattern)

The operational cascade (Relationship → Competence → Resources) operates as a partial stabiliser rather than a transmission pathway: the dispositif provides procedural coherence even when political alignment fragments (C.6, C.15).

### E.4 SECURITY COMMUNITY PHASE MAP

The multi-speed configuration of the alliance as a security community. Supports C.5 and Finding 5.

**Table E.4:** *Security community phase map: mature core, stressed centre, transactional periphery.*

Zone	Phase	Indicators
Nordic-Baltic + Poland	Mature	Shared threat perception, institutional density, genuine We-Feeling
US-UK-FRA-DEU	Stressed centre	Stress indicators within sustained institutional density [Medium]: conditional Art. 5, partisan polarisation, strategic divergence, “paper tiger” escalation, continued high interoperability
Turkey, Hungary, Slovakia	Nascent / transactional	Favourability 28–30%, systematic dissent, strategic ambiguity

## E.5 OLSON/ZECKHAUSER INVERSION

Spending data tested against classical alliance economics. The free-rider prediction is inverted for exposed members; it holds at the southern and western flanks. Supports C.4.5.

**Table E.5:** *Olson/Zeckhauser inversion: defence-spending shares against the classical free-rider prediction.*

Member	GDP	Defence %	O/Z Prediction	Actual
Poland		4.7%	Free-ride	Disproportionate investment
Estonia		3.4%	Free-ride	Disproportionate investment
Greece		3.68%	Free-ride	Disproportionate investment
USA		3.21%	Disproportionate burden	Reducing relative commitment
Spain		2.1%	Free-ride	Confirmed (formal exemption)

Source: NATO Defence Expenditure data.<sup>340</sup>

## E.6 INSTITUTIONAL LOGIC SHIFT (SUMMIT DECLARATIONS)

The evaluative grammar across four summit cycles (Madrid to Hague). Documents the decoupling pattern on Values. Supports C.4.4.

**Table E.6:** *Institutional logic shift across four summit declarations (2022–2025).*

Summit	Dominant Logic
Madrid 2022 <sup>341</sup>	Security + Values
Vilnius 2023	Consensus + Security
Washington 2024	Security + Bureaucracy
Hague 2025 <sup>342</sup>	Market + Sovereignty

## E.7 US TROOP DEPLOYMENT IN EUROPE (LONGITUDINAL)

Material density of the transatlantic relationship over four decades. Confirms that institutional density and political commitment can move independently. Supports C.4.2.

Source: US troop deployment data.<sup>343</sup>

<sup>340</sup> NATO, “Defence Expenditures and NATO’s 5% Commitment,” 18 December 2025; IISS, *The Military Balance 2026* (London: Routledge, 2026).

<sup>343</sup> Congressional Research Service, “U.S. Military Presence in Europe: Issues for Congress,” updated March 2026. Troop data: 305,000 (1991), 64,000 (2020 nadir), approximately 100,000 (2022–2024 post-invasion surge).

**Table E.7:** *US troop deployment in Europe, 1991–2024.*

Year	Approximate Strength	Context
1991	305,000	Post-Cold War peak (224k in Germany)
2014	65,000	Post-drawdown nadir
2020	64,000	First Trump administration low
2022–24	100,000	Post-invasion surge

## E.8 HISTORICAL CARRYING-CAPACITY STRESS TESTS

Three intra-alliance crises compared: Suez (1956), Iraq (2003), Greenland (2025–26). Calibrates the current moment against historical absorption mechanisms. Supports B.5.

**Table E.8:** *Historical carrying-capacity stress tests: Suez, Iraq 2003, Greenland.*

Crisis	Mechanism of Absorption	Key Condition	Bypass Mechanism
Suez 1956	Institutional repair (Three Wise Men)	Crisis separated from core defence mission	Consultation reform
Iraq 2003	Compartmentalisation (DPC bypass, Art. 4)	War externalised to CoW; minimal defensive core preserved	Defence Planning Committee
Greenland 2025–26	Davos de-escalation	Intra-alliance peaceful change directly tested	None identified

*Note:* The DPC was dissolved in 2010 following France's reintegration into the integrated military command. The institutional bypass mechanism that preserved the alliance during the 2003 Iraq split no longer exists.

Source:<sup>344</sup>

<sup>344</sup> NATO, "Report of the Committee of Three" (1956); NATO, "Decision Sheet of the Defence Planning Committee," 16 February 2003; NATO, "NATO to Deploy Defensive Assistance to Turkey," 19 February 2003; NATO, "NATO and the 2003 Campaign Against Iraq." DPC dissolved 2010.

## E.9 ITERATION-WINDOW PROXY: ALLIANCE RESPONSE TEMPO VERSUS ADVERSARY ACTION TEMPO

Time elapsed between stress event and consensual NATO response versus adversary reaction time. Documents the iteration-dynamics meta-constraint (C.2, Finding 6) across nine historical and contemporary episodes. “Days” denotes calendar days from event to formal alliance-level response.

**Table E.9:** *Iteration-window proxy: NATO consensus response tempo versus adversary action tempo across nine crisis episodes (1956–2026).*

Crisis	NATO Response	Adversary Tempo	Structural Note
Suez 1956	Months	Days	Three Wise Men report as post-hoc repair; no real-time consensus
Iraq 2003	Days (DPC bypass)	N/A (intra-alliance)	DPC authorised Turkey defence 16--19 Feb; NAC deadlocked; DPC dissolved 2010
Georgia 2008	Days--weeks	Hours	Russian forces entered 8 Aug; NAC statement 19 Aug
Crimea 2014	Weeks	Days	Unmarked forces seized Crimea 27 Feb; Wales Summit response Sept 2014
Ukraine 2022	Days--weeks	Months / Hours	Force posture surge rapid; political consensus on scope took months
Sweden/Finland 2022--24	600+ days	N/A (accession)	Turkey/Hungary blockade; resolved via transactional F-16/EU trade
Greenland 2025--26	Weeks	Hours (statement)	Davos de-escalation Jan 2026; underlying challenge unresolved
Iran March 2026	Minutes (kinetic)	Minutes	Missile intercept successful; NAC non-activation ongoing
Storm-1516 campaigns	Weeks--months	Hours--days	BND attribution Dec 2025/Jan 2026; adversary cycles in days

*Note:* The table documents a persistent structural pattern rather than individual crisis management failures. Where NATO response tempo matched adversary tempo (Iran 2026, kinetic intercept), the response was automated-military, not political-consensual. Where the response required political consensus, the iteration window was systematically longer than the adversary’s action cycle. The pattern confirms the iteration-dynamics meta-constraint: the consensus mechanism that produces legitimacy also produces tempo disadvantage.<sup>345</sup>

<sup>345</sup> Sources: NATO communiqués; ISW assessments; RUSI timelines; SHAPE records; BND attribution (LinkedIn, Dec 2025/Jan 2026); VIGINUM Storm-1516 reports (Feb/May 2025).

## F CLOSING DIAGNOSIS

NATO's coordination architecture in April 2026 exhibits persistent, unevenly distributed incoherence across all seven dimensions, sustained by an institutional dispositif whose durability machinery simultaneously prevents the architectural adaptation required to resolve the three-layer configuration conflict between a declared values community, an operative conditional hierarchy, and sedimented expectations that no longer match either.

*Consensus as ceremony: the alliance's defining coordination mechanism reproduces declared unity through institutional ritual while the operative order diverges on every dimension and the sedimented expectation order resists adaptation.*

Hierarchy, selective decoupling, and minilateral clustering within the operative order are not inherently pathological — asymmetric alliances routinely operate through such configurations. The diagnostic significance is not the divergence from symmetry but the three-way inconsistency between what is declared, what operates, and what is expected, and the absence of institutional mechanisms to reconcile them.

Three transmission cascades propagate stress across the dimensional block: the normative cascade (Purpose → Values → Legitimacy), the structural cascade (Identity → Relationship → Resources), and the capability paradox (Competence ← Purpose → Resources). The operational cascade (Relationship → Competence → Resources) holds through the dispositif's procedural stability, providing the residual functionality that keeps the alliance militarily operational despite political fragmentation.

The architecture persists through institutional inertia rather than coherence — the dispositif reproduces itself independently of political alignment. This persistence is real, structurally grounded, and functionally significant: it is why NATO functions when it functions. Inertia sustains without adapting, and the bypass mechanisms that historically absorbed severe political splits (the DPC in 2003)<sup>346</sup> have been dissolved.

The diagnosis rests on two co-fundamental structural beams.

**Dimensional beam:** documents the persistent, unevenly distributed incoherence across the seven dimensions — what the architecture must produce but fails to produce.

**Iteration-dynamics beam:** documents the time-coherence mismatch — why coherence production cannot complete within the windows the current strategic environment imposes.

The two together explain both the shape of the fracture (dimensional) and its accumulating trajectory (temporal). Russia compensates for material inferiority with architectural coherence, through imposed rather than generated means — a distinct durability mode whose fragility is

<sup>346</sup> NATO, "Decision Sheet of the Defence Planning Committee," 16 February 2003; NATO, "NATO to Deploy Defensive Assistance to Turkey," 19 February 2003. DPC dissolved 2010.



sudden rupture rather than slow erosion. NATO compensates for architectural incoherence with material superiority and institutional redundancy.

The durability question is which compensation holds longer under current and anticipated stress — and whether either compensation can be produced at the tempo the environment requires.

*Confidence note:* The multimodal incoherence diagnosis rests on High-confidence findings across the dimensional analyses. Two components carry reduced confidence: the transatlantic stress-indicators categorisation (Medium — sociological stress within sustained institutional density, not a directly measured phase shift) and the carrying-capacity proximity claim (Medium-High — calibrated by historical comparison with Suez, Iraq 2003, and Greenland, but threshold not directly measurable). The closing diagnosis is robust to these qualifications.

What the NATO application demonstrates methodically is the derivation's applicability under full empirical complexity: three starting conditions, seven dimensions, approximately sixty canonical theories, three narrative instances, and a 2022–2026 stress window. The dimensional decomposition carried the integration without internal friction; the seven findings specify what this integration produces that isolated frameworks do not.

This analysis works exclusively with the published NP proof and the scientific canon. The structural diagnosis it produces is the foundation, not the ceiling, of what the dimensional architecture makes accessible.

## Annex 1

### SEVEN FINDINGS REQUIRING THE NP DERIVATION

The abstract claims seven findings not formulable without the NP derivation.

The NP derivation specifies its own falsification conditions. The derivation applies only where its three starting conditions obtain (Proposition 0): C1 (Plurality), C2 (Interdependence), C3 (Processing). Where any of these conditions does not hold, the derivation does not apply. The seven-dimensional architecture is derived, not assumed: if the derivation produced fewer or different dimensions, or if the simultaneous application of approximately 60 canonical theories across these dimensions produced contradictions rather than convergent results, the architectural claim would be falsified. The frictionlessness of simultaneous application — the finding that the canonical theories operate without mutual contradiction when applied through NP’s dimensional decomposition — is itself an empirical result that could have failed. Its confirmation is not absorption but corroboration under risk.

The seven findings are:

**1. The three-layer configuration conflict as temporal divergence.** Meyer/Rowan (1977) identify two-layer decoupling (formal versus operative). The NP derivation — through H.4 and the Durability Condition — identifies a *third* structural layer: sedimented expectations that persist independently of both declared text and operative practice. The finding that NATO’s architecture is under a three-layer conflict — not binary decoupling but temporal divergence across layers with different adaptation tempi — is formulable only with this third-layer concept.

*NP element: H.4 + Durability Condition.*

**2. The Dispositif Paradox: durability mechanism as adaptation barrier.** Zucker (1977) explains persistence; Barnett/Finnemore (2004) explain pathology. Both observations are available without NP. What is not available is the structural necessity claim: R2 (Critical Infrastructure) establishes that the coordination architecture is infrastructure whose maintenance is itself a coordination task.

It follows that the reproduction mechanism *must* also be the rigidity mechanism — not as a contingent empirical observation but as an architectural property. The same institutional machinery that makes the architecture durable makes it rigid, because maintenance requires procedural stability, and procedural stability resists the tempo changes that adaptation demands. This is not Zucker plus Barnett/Finnemore; it is the structural reason why their findings co-obtain necessarily rather than accidentally.

*NP element: R2 + dimensional block analysis.*

**3. T4 asymmetry: referential completeness versus material superiority.** No existing IR framework defines “architectural completeness” as an advantage category independent of

material power. The NP derivation — through T4 and D.3.2 — identifies that Russia's structural advantage lies in referential completeness, not in material capacity.

This finding operates at the declared-operative level. A full three-level assessment of Instance 3 lies outside this analysis's scope (Scope Limitation 6). The imposed/generated distinction is substantiated by independent forensic analysis of Russian information-domain governance, which documents a capability ceiling (4.5–5.0/10): strong institutionalisation raising the floor, absence of explicit theory and cost logic lowering the ceiling.<sup>347</sup> The structural reasons — authoritarian closure constraining adaptation — confirm that imposed coherence is a distinct durability mode whose fragility is sudden rupture rather than slow erosion. The finding identifies a structural advantage under R4 without assessing the durability or brittleness of that advantage under the same three-level test applied to NATO.

*NP element: T4 + D.3.2.*

**4. The normative cascade Purpose → Values → Legitimacy as structurally enabled transmission.** D.3.2 establishes that each dimension references every other — referential dependence is symmetric and universal. Every inter-dimensional link is therefore a potential transmission pathway.

D.3.2 establishes that the transmission is structurally available along any inter-dimensional link. The empirical question is which links activate under current stress. Purpose → Values → Legitimacy activates because Purpose and Values are the two most stressed dimensions (C.4), and Suchman's coupling — moral legitimacy maps to Values and Purpose (NP G.5) — provides the mechanism through which their stress transmits to the Legitimacy dimension. Without D.3.2, this is observed correlation; with it, the cascade is a structurally grounded pathway whose activation is empirically selected by the current stress concentration. The cascade is not the only possible transmission direction — D.3.2 makes all directions structurally available — but it is the one the current dimensional stress pattern selects, through a specifiable coupling mechanism.

*NP element: D.3.2 + T3 + empirical amplitude.*

**5. The Multi-Speed Security Community as dimensional fragmentation.** Deutsch (1957) and Adler/Barnett (1998) describe security community phases as political categories. T3 converts this into a *dimensional* diagnosis: each zone's phase corresponds to a specifiable dimensional configuration, not a political label.

*NP element: T3 + dimensional block configuration.*

**6. Time compression as iteration-dynamic meta-constraint converting dimensional stress to control loss.** The combination of NP's C3-iteration mechanism and the Durability Condition establishes that coherence is produced through recurring iteration and that durability requires this production to persist. Neither element alone entails a time-window constraint.

Combined, they yield the claim that where iteration windows are systematically shorter than coherence-production requirements, dimensional stress converts to accumulating control loss rather than resolving through iteration. This is formulable only because NP establishes

<sup>347</sup> Martin Sauer, "Mx Russia: Information Governance as a Power Function," DURCHD8, January 2026, <https://durchd8.com/mx-russia-information-governance-as-a-power-function/>.



C3-iteration as the coherence-production mechanism and the Durability Condition as the persistence requirement. Observed individually (Boyd OODA, tempo-mismatch literature, crisis decision-making research), the components exist; integrated through NP, they produce a structural diagnosis of iteration-dynamics failure that the individual components do not express.

*NP element: C3 + Durability Condition + Lemma.*

### **7. Sender-amplification mechanism as structurally locatable effect of dimensional vacancy.**

The observation that official corrective communication can amplify rather than neutralise adversary disinformation in low-trust environments is available without NP — reactance theory (Brehm), motivated reasoning (Kunda), and affective polarisation (Iyengar/Westwood) each describe the individual psychological mechanisms.

What is not available without NP is the *structural location* of the failure. The H2-spine — the narrative coordination layer through which a coordination architecture maintains coherence at the meaning level — identifies the specific architectural deficit: where the H2-spine is unoccupied, every downstream intervention enters a space already structured by adversary framing. D.3.2 (referential dependence) establishes that Values and Legitimacy vacancies on the sender side cannot be compensated by Competence or Resources interventions — the dimensional vacancy transmits through the referential structure. T3 (multimodal synchronisation) requires that the corrective signal cohere across modalities; where institutional trust is low (14% government satisfaction, 81% insularity), the sender’s signal is decoded through the adversary’s frame rather than through institutional authority.

The combination — H2-spine vacancy + D.3.2 transmission + T3 incoherence between sender credibility and message content — produces a structurally grounded explanation for why “more response” can deepen rather than repair the damage. Storm-1516 against France and Germany (C.14) provides the empirical demonstration.

*NP element: H2-spine + D.3.2 + T3.*

## Annex 2

### SCOPE LIMITATIONS

The following gaps, carried forward from the dimensional analyses, constrain the findings:

1. **Cross-domain synchronisation mechanism:** Domain-specific competence documented; the coordination layer between domains is not.
2. **Consensus mechanism when functioning:** The analysis documents fragmentation extensively but lacks evidence for how consensus *actually works when it works*. Incoherence is more observable than coherence (dissent generates documents; quiet alignment does not).  
The diagnosis of persistent incoherence is robust to this caveat because the structural mechanisms operate independently of observation frequency – but the *magnitude* of incoherence may be overstated.
3. **Values coherence across 32 members:** Patterns identified; systematic measurement unavailable.
4. **Sedimentation depth:** Structural patterns identified; direct observability limited.
5. **Chinese IO complementarity:** The two-vector distinction is corroborated by four independent sources. The *complementarity* mechanism (whether the two vectors interact to multiply pressure) remains analytically inferred.
6. **Instance 3 (Russia) three-level assessment:** The R4 finding operates at the declared-operative level. A full three-level assessment for Instance 3 lies outside this analysis's scope. The imposed/generated distinction and fragility-mode qualification partially address this gap.
7. **Asymmetry overcoding:** The analysis may overcode asymmetry, hierarchy, and selective decoupling as erosion indicators when these can be constitutively normal features of asymmetric alliances. The three-way decoupling distinction (functional/erosive/collapse-threshold) and the explicit qualifier in C.3 address this risk, but the distinction between constitutive friction and erosive friction is empirically difficult in real time.