

‘The alliance audience effect in America’s Asian alliances’

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Abstract

Although leaders have often feared that backing down in one crisis will lead adversaries to judge them as irresolute and prompt further challenges in other areas, recent scholarship has suggested states do not obtain reputations for resolve. This research challenges conventional deterrence theory and is of immense policy relevance today. For example, the U.S. may be able to back down on issues in Syria or Ukraine without suffering adverse reputational costs and emboldening other adversaries.

Unlike the notion of adversaries judging a state's resolve, little scholarly work has focussed on how states judge the reliability of their allies. Using case studies from Cold War-era Asia, this paper argues that a state will monitor how its ally behaves in other alliance relationships in order to make informed assessments about their ally's security reliability. Based on these assessments, a state will change its defense policies in order to mitigate the risks—such as abandonment or entrapment—that are posed by an unreliable ally. A state's behaviour occurs in front of an audience of interested allies, and if those allies judge the state's security reliability to be poor, then an “alliance audience effect” can emerge. This occurs when states adopt specific forms of balancing behaviour in order to mitigate the risks posed by an ally's unreliability.

This paper's conclusions are relevant not only for contemporary policy issues, such as the US 'rebalance' to Asia, but also understanding 'loyalty' or 'reliability' perceptions within alliance politics.

The alliance audience effect in America's Asian alliances

How do states assess the reliability of an ally, and what do they do if their ally is judged unreliable? With international security tensions in Europe and Asia focussing attention on America's alliance relationships, these two questions are of the utmost importance to policy-makers and strategists. Leaders have always worried about how other states perceive the credibility of their threats and the reliability of their promises, but academic scholarship has focussed primarily on threats issued to adversaries. Deterrence theory, which held significant policy influence throughout the Cold War, concerns what an adversary believes about a state's level of resolve (the extent to which it will defend something). Some theorists, such as Thomas Schelling, argued that it was worth paying substantial costs in order to convince an adversary of one's resolve. Most famously, he wrote that the United States 'lost thirty thousand dead in Korea to save face...and it was undoubtedly worth it'.¹ For deterrence theorists, to back down is to invite further challenges whereas to stand firm is to discourage them.

Recent scholarship has questioned aspects of deterrence theory and instead suggests that backing down in one confrontation does not lead an adversary to regard a state as irresolute, or increase the likelihood of further challenges. Authors such as Daryl Press and Jonathan Mercer have argued that in assessing a state's level of resolve, an adversary is more likely to consider that state's current interests and capabilities, rather than its past actions.² For interactions with adversaries, recent scholarship concludes that credible threats require significant interests and the capabilities necessary to pursue or protect them. However, there has been less academic focus on another aspect of international relations – how a state might assess the security reliability of an ally.

Some authors have argued that states should not worry about whether allies consider them reliable. Mercer suggests that because 'Decision-makers do not consistently use another state's past behaviour...to predict that state's behavior', the United States should not be concerned about its allies viewing it as irresolute, as these allies will simply assume that America's 'interests and capabilities determine [its] resolve'.³ Although Press largely supports Mercer's conclusions about adversaries and resolve, he is more reserved on how allies might assess a state's actions. Press notes that although 'it is critical to know how countries assess the credibility of their allies,' this remains a research gap.⁴

The issue of reliability within alliances is not a completely unexplored field, but most of the scholarly work focussing on alliance reliability has examined its connection to alliance formation and termination. Douglas Gibler looks primarily at the issue of alliance formation, but also finds that states with reliable

¹ Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp.124-125.

² See Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,

² See Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) and Daryl Press, *Calculating Credibility* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

³ Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, pp.227-8.

⁴ Press, *Calculating Credibility*, p.160.

allies are less likely to be targeted in disputes.⁵ Gregory Miller finds that unreliable states will be more constrained by the design of their alliances—allies will impose tighter alliance controls to compensate for any unreliability—but it is less clear how this finding assists in understanding alliance management in situations where the simple rewriting of an alliance treaty might not be practical.⁶ For example, it is hard to conceive how Japan, if it began to doubt American reliability today, could simply rewrite its alliance with the United States in order to mitigate the risk of abandonment. Brett Leeds has considered the reliability of alliance commitments in times of war, but the subject of reliability perceptions within non-wartime alliance management is relatively unexamined.⁷

This article constructs and tests a theory of the “alliance audience effect”, which addresses how states might observe their ally’s behaviour in order to form assessments about its security reliability. Drawing on neo-realist alliance theory, this article argues that a state should monitor how their ally behaves within other alliance relationships in order to form accurate assessments of the ally’s reliability. Based on these assessments, states should adopt balancing behaviour in order to mitigate the risks of abandonment or entrapment. After discussing the deductive basis for these ideas, I test them against America’s conduct in Asia between 1949-1951.

I do not claim that a state’s observations of allied behaviour will be the only influence on that state’s beliefs about the reliability of the ally. However, this article shows that states do monitor the conduct of their ally and that these observations can influence that state to adopt balancing behaviour intended to mitigate the risks posed by the ally’s unreliability. I argue that the “alliance audience” exists, and that demonstrating unreliability on the global stage can have significant effects. The article then concludes by outlining the current policy relevance of these concepts and suggesting further areas of research.

The theoretical basis for reliability assessments

Neo-realist alliance theory posits that states are unitary and rational actors seeking security in an anarchical system of nation-states.⁸ Imperfect information about the intent of other states creates conditions of insecurity, because states can never have perfect knowledge of whether other states have friendly or hostile intent. In some cases, states form alliances in order to improve their

⁵ Douglas Gibling, ‘The Costs of Reneging: Reputation and Alliance Formation’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52 No. 3 (June 2008), pp. 426-454.

⁶ Gregory Miller, *The Shadow of the Past: Reputation and Military Alliances Before the First World War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

⁷ Brett Leeds, ‘Alliance Reliability in Times of War: Explaining State Decisions to Violate Treaties’, *International Organization*, Vol 57: Fall 2003, pp.801-827.

⁸ This outline is based on primarily on Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Long Grove: Waveland Press Inc., 1979), Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), George Liska, *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1962) and Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making and System Structure in International Crises*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

physical security against military attack: they pool their military capabilities in order to deter adversaries and increase the military power available in case of aggression. Other alliances might have a security focus for one state only: this state might receive security benefits, but provide its ally with non-security benefits, such influence over foreign policy, preferential trade deals, or some other form of side-payment.⁹

Alliances require some degree of mutual benefit, or they would never form. It makes no sense for a state to enter into an alliance, nor persist in one, where the costs or risks of the alliance are greater than the benefits. Therefore, states monitor and review alliances to ensure that they continue to be beneficial, and not detrimental, to the state's security. Within alliance politics, states are fearful of abandonment and entrapment. Abandonment—which I define as when an ally decides that it is in their best interest to renege on an alliance commitment—can immediately undermine a state's security. In a time of war, the consequences of such abandonment could be nothing less than national destruction. The consequences of entrapment—which I define as when a state decides the value of the alliance outweighs the costs of preserving it, but it would have been preferable to avoid those costs—can also be severe. A state, heavily dependent on its alliance for security, might be deeply reluctant to provide military support to a belligerent or rogue ally, but the consequences of not doing so—a loss of the alliance and the security it provides—might be so severe that the decision approaches a *fait accompli*.

In seeking to understand the strategic interests and military capabilities of an ally, it is logical that a state would monitor its ally's behaviour in the international system. Such attempts would be no doubt rendered less effective by the anarchical nature of the international system and the unreliability of imperfect knowledge, but the security stakes mean that such efforts—even if they produce only limited insight—may still be wise and useful. Because an ally's decision to renege on an alliance commitment could instantly, irrevocably and catastrophically damage a state's security, it makes sense for states to be concerned about this possibility and alert to signals that suggest it is becoming more or less likely. Each state will monitor their ally's behaviour in order to assess the ally's reliability, which I define as the extent to which the two allies share and value convergent strategic interests. A state will view their ally as reliable if they see evidence to suggest that their strategic interests are convergent. When interests are convergent in this way, states within an alliance are unlikely to pose entrapment or abandonment risks to each other, because they have common strategic interests. Therefore, each state will perceive its ally to be reliable. However, if ally B's behaviour suggests that their interests are different to those of state A, then A will view B as an unreliable ally (see Table 1).

⁹ See James Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35 No. 4 (November 1991), pp.904-933.

Divergent interests (ally B too conciliatory)	Convergent (shared) interests	Divergent interests (ally B too belligerent)
A in dispute with adversary B has no stake in quarrel	A and B united: both have dispute with adversary	B in dispute with adversary A has no stake in dispute
A fears abandonment	Alliance unity, as interests are at or are close to point of convergence	A fears entrapment
A perceives B to be an unreliable ally	A perceives B to be a reliable ally	A perceives B to be an unreliable ally

Table 1: table depicting the area of convergent strategic interests and alliance reliability (the middle column), with alliance unreliability to its left and right

If a state believes their ally to be unreliable because they are likely to renege and not provide promised military support in a moment of need (i.e. the ally's preferred strategy is too conciliatory, and they are unreliable due to the risk of abandonment), then the state should address this likelihood through balancing behaviour, such as the acquisition of new weapons, the conciliation of enemies or the pursuit of new alliances. If a state assesses their ally to be unreliable because the ally is likely to pursue an unwanted conflict (i.e. the ally's strategy is too belligerent, and they are unreliable due to the risk of entrapment), then the state should balance by attempting to restrain the ally, pursuing peace initiatives, disassociating itself from the ally's actions, or by abrogating the alliance.

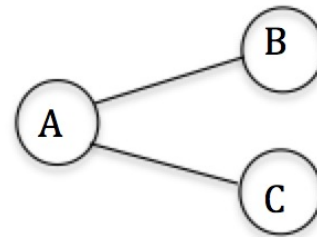
Are states concerned with loyalty or reliability?

Importantly, I have cast the term "reliability" in a way that allows it to be used across a variety of different alliance interactions.¹⁰ An alternate approach would have been to consider an ally's "loyalty", but this term is problematic. If it is said that a state doubts its ally's loyalty, then the predominant interpretation is that the state fears abandonment. Thus, considering perceptions of an ally's loyalty would confine the issue to interactions where the fear is that of abandonment.

¹⁰ My concept of reliability differs from that used by Gregory Miller in *The Shadow of the Past*. In his hypotheses, the word "unreliable" could essentially be replaced with "disloyal".

However, perceptions of “reliability”, by focussing on the convergence and strength of strategic interests, also permit an analysis of how states will assess the entrapment risks posed by their ally. A state might have no doubt that their ally will be loyal (i.e they will provide support in the event of war), but this confidence might be due to the fact that the ally openly desires conflict. In this case, the state might view their ally as unreliable not because they lack loyalty, but because their strategic interests are extremely divergent – state A wants a war that its ally, state B, desperately wishes to avoid. Therefore, not all unreliable allies are disloyal. If nations display similar forms of behaviour when they are concerned about both abandonment and entrapment (i.e. both forms allied unreliability), then greater explanatory power can be achieved.

Furthermore, terms such as “loyalty” and “disloyalty” go beyond describing behaviour – they also carry suggestions of a national character. Some might think that a state’s disloyalty to one ally is indicative of an inherent character trait and that it will be similarly disloyal to other allies. However, a state’s decision to be disloyal and abandon one ally might result in it



becoming more reliable to other allies. For example, in the alliance structure depicted in figure 1, B might recklessly provoke a conflict with a state friendly to both A and C. If A abandons B, then A will preserve military capabilities valuable to state C’s security: had A fought alongside B, then every missile A used to defend B is a missile unavailable for the defense of state C against some other enemy. Furthermore, if A abandons B, then A will cut short or discourage a war that C would prefer not to occur. A’s actions would demonstrate that its interests are convergent with C’s, and therefore state C is likely to regard A as a reliable ally. Thus, A’s decision to be ‘disloyal’ toward B may lead C to consider A to be a more reliable ally.

Finally, looking solely at instances of loyalty and disloyalty would result in a much smaller group of data from which case studies and correlations can be drawn. A focus on less dramatic alliance interactions—such as perceptions of divergence in strategic interests and efforts to mitigate the risks these pose—is likely to produce findings more relevant for alliance management during moments of security tension short of outright war.

Because a state’s decision to abandon one ally will not automatically cause all of its other allies to fear abandonment, terms such as “loyalty” seem too pejorative and laden with character implications. Because not all disloyal allies are unreliable and not all unreliable allies will be disloyal, the more value-neutral term of reliability is preferable to terms that suggest traits of immutable national character. Furthermore, it has the benefit of increased generalizability across different forms of alliance interactions.

A theory of alliance audience effects

As stated earlier, alliances form because of convergent interests between states – they wish to codify and proclaim these interests for deterrence purposes. These commitments might have been beyond question at the time an alliance was signed, but national interests and capabilities can vary over time as resources grow or diminish, or as political systems and leaders change. Strategic interests can become divergent or military capabilities can become less powerful, thus weakening the alliance. As Walt notes, an ‘alliance may be dead long before anyone notices, and the discovery of the corpse may come at a very inconvenient moment’.¹¹

If a state knows that once convergent interests have become divergent, then it will have an incentive to conceal this from its ally. After all, this knowledge might damage the intimacy of the alliance or, *in extremis*, result in its abrogation and thus the removal of its deterrent value. As Press puts it, the statements of leaders can be ‘worse than cheap talk; they are the words of people with a powerful motive to deceive’.¹² If a state knows that divergent interests have resulted in the death of an alliance, then that state has a powerful incentive to conceal the corpse.

Therefore, because a state cannot trust the professed intent of even its ally, it will monitor the ally’s conduct to determine whether their capabilities and interests have changed over time. Given that interactions within alliance relationships are one of the best ways to assess a state’s interests and how deeply they are valued, I argue that one measure of how states will assess the security reliability of their ally is to closely observe how their ally behaves toward its other allies. As the earlier example demonstrated, if A’s actions within the A-B alliance demonstrate that A’s interests are still convergent with those of C, then C will perceive A to be a reliable ally.

But alternatively, A’s actions within the A-B alliance may result in C assessing that its interests are no longer convergent with those of its ally, A. As a result of observing interactions in the A-B alliance, C may now view A to be an unreliable ally, because it poses significant risks of either abandonment or entrapment. I argue that in such cases, C should attempt to mitigate the risks posed by the unreliability of its ally.

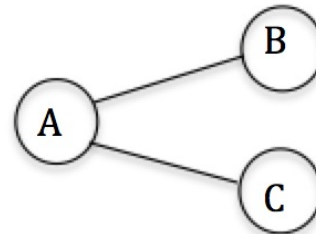
From this deductive extension of neorealist alliance theory, I test two hypotheses to determine, firstly, whether states monitor their ally’s behaviour toward its other allies in order to form assessments of its security reliability, and secondly, whether states then act on these assessments of their ally’s reliability.

¹¹ Stephen Walt, “Why alliances endure or collapse”, *Survival*, Vol. 39 No. 1 (Spring 1997), p.167.

¹² Press, *Calculating Credibility*, p.154.

Hypothesis 1: state A's behaviour toward ally B will influence the reliability perceptions of ally C.

As argued earlier, I do not expect that A's loyalty to B will necessarily make it a more reliable ally to C, or that A's disloyalty toward B makes it a less reliable to state C. C's perceptions of A's reliability will be determined by whether A's behaviour within the A-B alliance demonstrates that A's interests are convergent, or divergent, with those of state C.



However, even if hypothesis 1 is true, it is a somewhat unsatisfying observation unless it has a significant effect. Hypothesis 2 gives power to the observations in hypothesis 1 by showing that, having observed their ally behave in a particular way and now having less faith in their ally's security reliability, states will attempt to improve their security situation. Hypothesis 1 tests whether an "alliance audience" exists, hypothesis 2 examines whether interactions observed by the "alliance audience" have any significant effect.

Hypothesis 2: if state C, based on its observations of A's behaviour toward B, perceives A to be unreliable ally, it will adopt balancing behaviour that mitigates this unreliability.

For hypothesis 2, I expect that state C will balance in a way that reduces the specific risks posed by A's unreliability. For example, if A is an unreliable ally because it poses entrapment risks, C will attempt to restrain A or otherwise reduce the risk of war through diplomacy, conciliating the ally's adversary or abrogating the alliance (thus eliminating the entrapment risk). If A is unreliable because it poses abandonment risks, C will attempt to improve its own defensive capabilities, strengthen the A-C alliance, conciliate adversaries or form new alliances.

I now test these hypotheses against American policy in Northeast Asia from 1949-1951. In doing so, I use Walt's definition of an alliance as 'a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states'.¹³ Although the US had not yet signed formal alliance agreements with any of these states, American forces clearly and unarguably served as the security provider for Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Philippines. Other countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, were wartime allies of the US and were established in other forms of intimate security cooperation such as intelligence sharing.

These case studies were selected because of the structure of the alliance system that emerged shortly after World War II. The alliance dynamics outlined above

¹³ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p.12.

would be different in multilateral alliance or coalitions and clear evidence would be harder to obtain. Furthermore, because of current security tensions in Asia, any findings relevant to this hub-and-spoke system will be policy relevant despite their limited generalisability.

Case study 1: Korean observations of the US-Japan and US-Formosa relationships

At the conclusion of World War II, the United States occupied both Japan and Korea. Korea was divided at the 38th parallel and two separate Governments were established in 1948: the Republic of Korea (South Korea) led by President Syngman Rhee, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) led by Kim Il-sung. Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces from North Korea in 1948, the US also sought to withdraw its own forces from the Korean Peninsula.

From its inception, South Korea's security situation was precarious and it was extremely dependent on the US for security against external attack. In late 1948 the American Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, John Muccio, warned that only the US 'Army presence guarantees minimum Korean external and internal security'.¹⁴ Muccio felt that American support for Korea also had an impact beyond the new nation – it 'would appear to render more secure US position in Japan...[and] restore faith of Asiatic people in US professions of interest and help'.¹⁵ Muccio believed the US commitment to Korea would affect regional perceptions of American reliability in the face of the new threat posed by Communism.

South Korea's president, Syngman Rhee, closely observed how America treated Japan and Nationalist China (Formosa), and observations of both relationships gave him cause to fear that America would abandon Korea. In February 1949 Rhee considered one of the 'principal difficulties' of the regional security situation to be 'the vacillation of the US State Department, which...had played a strong part in the loss of China, and might be seriously harmful in Korea'.¹⁶ These fears of US inconsistency were well-founded. Some US officials believed the withdrawal of Russian forces from North Korea meant the US should withdraw its forces off the Peninsula.¹⁷ Others thought it was essential to increase South Korea's military capacity prior to a US withdrawal.

In March 1949 the National Security Council (NSC) considered three possible US policies – a complete abandonment of Korea, the provision of a security guarantee, and a middle course of limited economic and military support. The NSC felt that an 'abrupt and complete US disengagement could be expected to

¹⁴ As quoted in The Assistant Secretary of State for Occupied Areas (Saltzman) to the Under Secretary of the Army (Draper), Top Secret, 25 January 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.944.

¹⁵ The Special Representative in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, Top Secret, 27 January 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.951.

¹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of the Army (Royall), Top Secret, 08 February 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.958

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

lead directly' to Soviet domination of Korea and would also 'be interpreted as a betrayal by the US of its friends and allies in the Far East'.¹⁸ The US was afraid that if it abandoned Korea, other countries would observe its behaviour and believe it to be a less reliable ally. This could lead countries to realign – either by shifting away from the US and bandwagoning with the USSR or by adopting more neutralist positions between the West and the Communist Bloc.

The NSC had no desire to provide a comprehensive security guarantee to Korea, as this would risk 'involvement in a major war in an area in which virtually all of the natural advantages would accrue to the USSR'.¹⁹ The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) believed that 'the US has little strategic interest in maintaining its present troops and bases in Korea'.²⁰ But neither could the US simply abandon Korea, as to do so would risk damage to other, more important relationships.

The US adopted as policy the middle course, which was to provide technical, economic and military support to Korea in order to 'minimize...the chances of south Korea's being brought under Communist domination'.²¹ By March 1949 General MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), felt this assistance program was sufficiently advanced that a complete withdrawal of US troops from the Peninsula could be justified: MacArthur believed a 'that troop withdrawal from Korea at this time would not adversely affect the US position in Japan'.²² As such, the NSC recommended that US forces should be withdrawn from Korea by 10 May 1949.

When Ambassador Muccio informed President Rhee of this planned withdrawal, Rhee was reluctant to publicly announce the news. Believing America to be an unreliable ally (i.e. believing that America's interests in Asia were divergent from his own, which prioritised the survival of South Korea), Rhee sought to convince the United States that it should provide a greater commitment to Korea's security. Muccio thought Rhee was 'tarrying, hopeful of more concrete confirmation that the US really intends to carry out assurances of military aid'. Rhee also 'expressed hope for some kind of agreement by which the US would guarantee Korean independence and protection in case of attack'.²³ A draft letter from Rhee to Muccio formalised Rhee's hope that some form of security guarantee should precede a US withdrawal, as 'the withdrawal of American troops without such a preliminary undertaking as I have suggested would be

¹⁸ NSC 8/2, Position of the United States with Respect to Korea, Top Secret, 22 March 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.975.

¹⁹ NSC 8/2, Position of the United States with Respect to Korea, Top Secret, 22 March 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.975.

²⁰ As quoted in NSC 8/2, Position of the United States with Respect to Korea, Top Secret, 22 March 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.975.

²¹ NSC 8/2, Position of the United States with Respect to Korea, Top Secret, 22 March 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.975.

²² NSC 8/2, Position of the United States with Respect to Korea, Top Secret, 22 March 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.977.

²³ The Special Representative in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, Top Secret, 14 April 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.988.

open to serious misunderstanding in Korea, in the United States, and in other countries, and might, therefore, have disastrous consequences'.²⁴

Rhee announced the withdrawal of US troops in mid-April, but throughout 1949 South Korea continued to push for a more explicit US security guarantee. In a May meeting, Ambassador Muccio records President Rhee as saying that 'there was a question in the minds of the Korean people whether the United States can be relied upon. The Korean people never thought, he said, that the United States would drop China'. For Rhee the unanswered question was 'if the United States has to be involved in a war to save Korea, how much can Korea count on the United States?'²⁵

Despite Ambassador Muccio's efforts to reassure him, Rhee continued to express doubts about US reliability. Rhee even complained that 'the United States has decided it is not worth while to try to defend Korea'. In particular, he cited a February 1949 statement by the Secretary of the Army, Kenneth Royall, which suggested that America had no obligation to defend Japan. Rhee thought this statement 'indicative of the American position in this respect. If Japan was outside the United States defense line, the President suggested, then Korea must well be outside that line'.²⁶ Notably, in Rhee exchanges with Ambassador Muccio and other officials, he didn't accuse America of being a disloyal ally toward Korea, Nationalist China or Japan, but rather complained that America's action towards the Republic of China and Japan demonstrated that the US would not be a reliable ally for Korea.

These examples support the prediction of hypothesis 1 – having observed American conduct toward Taiwan and Japan, Rhee concluded that the preservation of South Korea was not a vital strategic interest for the United States. With his suspicions about US reliability confirmed by the US withdrawal and by America's behaviour toward Japan and Formosa—and as expected by hypothesis 2—Rhee now sought to mitigate these risks by blackmailing the US into an alliance and seeking to form an anti-Communist "Pacific Pact" with other non-Communist countries.

Washington's unwillingness to provide Korea with a formal defence guarantee vexed Rhee and in May 1949 he attempted to pressure the US into a more explicit security arrangement. The South Korean press—'unquestionably inspired by governmental circles'—began to hint that a 'mutual defense agreement' between Korea and the US had been agreed, with one paper even reporting that the conclusion of a defence agreement would occur within a month.²⁷ Rhee also arranged for an official press statement to question the

²⁴ Draft Letter from the President of the Republic of Korea (Rhee) to the Special Representative in Korea (Muccio), Top Secret, 14 April 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.991.

²⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador in Korea (Muccio), Secret, 02 May 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, the Far East and Australasia, p.1004.

²⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador in Korea (Muccio), Secret, 02 May 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, the Far East and Australasia, p.1005.

²⁷ The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, Secret, 06 May 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.1009.

American commitment to Korea. This statement—with its direct consideration of ‘whether or not the United States considers that Southern Korea falls within its own first line of defense’—was very likely an attempt by Rhee to raise the public profile of the issue and place additional pressure on the United States.²⁸

When discussing these statements with Rhee, Ambassador Muccio noted that the ‘US had never entered into a mutual defense pact with any single nation, adding constant public reference here was embarrassing and would be productive of no favorable result’.²⁹ The reaction in Washington DC was even stronger: the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, cabled Muccio and instructed him to reprimand Rhee that ‘this apparent attempt force hand US Govt through resort public press is regarded not only as grave breach ordinary diplomatic courtesy but also as sharply inconsistent with spirit mutual friendliness and good faith upon which relations our two Govts based’.³⁰ Rhee continued to publicly express his hope of a bilateral security treaty, but now placed greater emphasis on the idea of a multilateral ‘Pacific Pact similar to the Atlantic Pact’, which could assist Korea against the Communist threat.³¹

On 18 May, Acheson released a statement that downplayed the prospects of a Pacific Pact. While noting the ‘serious dangers to world peace existing in the situation in Asia’, Acheson thought that ‘a Pacific defense pact could not take shape until present internal conflicts in Asia were resolved’.³² Undeterred, Rhee continued to talk up the possibility of such a pact, and informed the US Embassy in Seoul that it was discussing a possible pact with the Filipino Government.³³ The Pacific Pact idea was also the subject of discussions between the President of the Philippines, Elpidio Quirino, and the President of the Republic of China, Chiang Kai-shek, in July 1949.³⁴ But by August the idea of a Pacific Pact receded, perhaps as Rhee better appreciated the risks of South Korea becoming involved in the Chinese civil war.³⁵

In late May, as US troops withdrew, Muccio was taken aback at the depth of nervousness in Seoul. He cabled Acheson, noting that a ‘sense of crisis bordering on panic has enveloped high circles Korean Government which has in turn spread to people at large. Among factors responsible are propaganda line

²⁸ The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, 07 May 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.1012.

²⁹ The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, Secret, 09 May 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.1013.

³⁰ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Korea, Confidential, 09 May 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.1014.

³¹ The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, 16 May 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.1023.

³² Department of State Bulletin, 29 May 1949, p.696.

³³ See Memorandum of Conversation, by the Counselor of the Embassy in Korea (Drumright), Confidential, 28 May 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, the Far East and Australasia.

³⁴ See The Chargé in the Philippines (Lockett) to the Secretary of State, 12 July 1949, in FRUS, Vol VII, the Far East and Australasia.

³⁵ See Charles Dobbs, “The Pact That Never Was: The Pacific Pact of 1949”, *The Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 4 (Winter 1984), pp.29-42.

espoused by government at retention US troops...China debacle, et cetera'.³⁶ Korea requested that a final withdrawal be delayed and that a firmer security guarantee be articulated, but these pleas fell on deaf ears in Washington DC. In place of an explicit security guarantee, on 08 June 1949 the State Department issued a statement concerning 'US Policy Toward Korea'. This stated that the withdrawal of US troops 'in no way indicates a lessening of United States interest in the Republic of Korea, but constitutes rather another step toward the normalization of relations with that republic'.³⁷

Privately, the US had decided its position. It had drawn its defensive line, and South Korea was on the wrong side of it. Military planners regarded Korea as strategically unimportant and diplomats in the State Department were exasperated at Rhee's attempts to publicly blackmail the US into providing a security guarantee. Throughout the rest of 1949, Muccio would voice concerns from Seoul about the state of the South Korean military, particularly their naval and air forces.³⁸

Concurrent with these events on the Peninsula, the Chinese Nationalists suffered several defeats against their Communist foes and by December 1949, Nationalist forces had retreated to Taiwan. In August 1949, the Truman administration issued a China White Paper, which detailed the extensive support the US had provided to the Chinese Nationalists and attributed their defeat not to a lack of US support, but their own 'military ineptitude and political corruption'.³⁹ On 05 January 1950, President Truman announced that the US would no longer provide military assistance to the Chinese Nationalist forces on Formosa.

America's official abandonment of the Chinese Nationalists alarmed Rhee, who raised this issue with Philip Jessup, an American official appointed to consult with several Asian leaders. Jessup thought it 'clear that all of the Koreans were disturbed by the President's recent statement on Formosa and still hope that we may do something to help the Nationalists there'.⁴⁰ One week after Truman's announcement, on 12 January 1950 Acheson gave a speech to the National Press Club, where he outlined US defense policy in Asia. After voicing his firm commitment to the defence of Japan, Acheson described a 'defensive perimeter [that] runs along the Aleutians to Japan and then goes to the Ryukyus...[it] runs from the Ryukyus to the Philippine Islands'.⁴¹ The geographical limits of this line immediately alarmed Korean officials. Korea's Ambassador to the United States, John Chang, said that 'the fact Korea found itself on the other side of that

³⁶ The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, Secret, 31 May 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia, p.1035.

³⁷ Department of State Bulletin, 19 June 1949, p.781.

³⁸ See, for example, The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, Secret, 19 October 1949, pp.1088-1089, and The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, Top Secret, 18 November 1949, pp.1099-1101, both in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, The Far East and Australasia.

³⁹ Tucker, Nancy, *Uncertain Friends: Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992*, Twayne Publishers: New York, NY, 1994, p.24.

⁴⁰ Memorandum by the Ambassador at Large, Philip C. Jessup, Confidential, 14 January 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.4.

⁴¹ Acheson, Dean, Speech to National Press Club, 12 January 1950, see source 101.5.

line....appeared to raise the serious question as to whether the United States might now be considered as having abandoned Korea'.⁴²

In January 1950, Soviet intelligence reported that Korean leaders felt that 'the ROK would receive the same treatment' as the Chinese Nationalists on Formosa.⁴³ However, it seems Rhee realised that America's conduct toward Korea would be, to some degree, influenced by developments in Japan. Rhee felt that the US 'would not write off South Korea entirely (as he believed Washington had just done to Taiwan) until after the issue of Japan was resolved, but he did not believe that the United States would fight alongside the South'.⁴⁴ This contrasts slightly with Rhee's earlier belief (that the US would completely abandon South Korea). Now, having observed Acheson articulate a strong commitment to Japan's security in his Press Club speech, Rhee believed that the US would provide Korea with some support in war, if only to mollify Japanese concerns about Korean security.

It could be argued that these intelligence reports, which suggest that Rhee believed in a certain amount of interdependence between American behaviour towards Korea and Japan, cast doubt on Rhee's earlier statements to American diplomats. Concerned for his country's security, Rhee could have purposefully cited American conduct towards the Chinese Nationalists and Japan as a way of engaging American prestige, thus increasing the regional costs of an American abandonment of Korea. Stephen Walt has written of a similar risk when states threaten to defect and bandwagon. Walt argues that 'client states are likely to exaggerate their propensity to bandwagon, in order to persuade their patrons to provide more support...we should not forget that client states have a powerful incentive to overstate their propensity to defect'.⁴⁵ It might be said that in this case, Rhee had a powerful incentive to purposefully engage US prestige and regional perceptions of American security reliability.

However, these Soviet intelligence reports show that Rhee's rhetoric remained consistent when speaking to different audiences. When privately discussing the issue with other Korean leaders, Rhee repeated the argument he had previously put to Ambassador Muccio: that American behaviour toward Nationalist China and Japan led Rhee to doubt America's reliability. Because his rhetoric remained consistent despite the different audiences, these intelligence reports suggest Rhee's discussions with Muccio and other American officials were not duplicitous attempts to engage American prestige for Korea's benefit. These same Soviet reports suggested that Rhee's fears were so acute that he was willing to pursue a closer security relationship with Japan. Thomas Christensen notes that Rhee 'was discussing the need for closer collaboration with Japan in

⁴² Memorandum of conversation, by Mr John Z. Williams of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, Confidential, 20 January 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.12.

⁴³ Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith*, p.54.

⁴⁴ Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith*, p.54.

⁴⁵ Stephen Walt, "Alliance Formation in Southwest Asia: Balancing and Bandwagoning", in Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder, *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.70.

the future as a solution to the potential for abandonment by the United States'.⁴⁶ Given the extreme historical tensions between Korea and Japan, such reports place further emphasis on the severity of Rhee's apprehensions. It is likely he would only consider such an option if he believed America's security reliability to be very poor.

Public remarks from the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Tom Connally, soon reinvigorated abandonment fears in Korea. Asked whether 'the suggestion that we abandon south Korea is going to be seriously considered?', Connally replied that 'it is going to be seriously considered because I'm afraid it's going to happen, whether we want it to or not'.⁴⁷ Later that day, Assistant Secretary of State Rusk wrote to the Undersecretary of State, noting that these remarks were likely to cause alarm in South Korea. Rusk particularly emphasised that the issue of the defensive perimeter was something about which 'the Korean Government is particularly sensitive'. He argued that because the US was not going to provide Korea with a security guarantee, 'any public reference to the Japan-Ryukyus-Philippine line can only serve to undermine the confidence of the Korean Government and people, and consequently their will to resist the ever-present threat of Communist aggression'.⁴⁸

Exactly as Rusk feared, Connally's remarks provoked a strong reaction from Rhee, who regarded them as 'an open invitation to the Communists to come down and take over South Korea'. The Chargé of the American Embassy in Korea thought Rhee's 'faith in the determination of the United States to assist Korea in the event of North Korean aggression has been shaken to an appreciable extent by Senator Connally's remarks'. These remarks, combined with a perceived lack of economic and military support and 'persistent "talk" that Korea lies outside the United States' Far Eastern strategic defense zone, is having a decidedly unsettling effect on Korean officials'.⁴⁹

Ambassador Muccio became more concerned that Korean officials were closely observing how the US treated South Korea differently to other countries, particularly Japan. Muccio cabled Assistant Secretary of State Rusk to express his concern about 'public statements attributed to the President, the Secretary, or other high Government officials in which various countries are named as special objects of US interest and concern, but from which the name of Korea very frequently is omitted. These omissions are always noted here in Korea and they add to the sensitivity and fear of the Korean Government and Korean citizens that the US Government is not fixed in its determination to assist Korea and will abandon Korea at the earliest opportunity'.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Christensen, *Worse Than a Monolith*, p.54.

⁴⁷ Excerpt from: 'U.S. News & World Report', 05 May 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.65.

⁴⁸ Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk) to the Under Secretary of State (Webb), Confidential, 02 May 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.65.

⁴⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chargé in Korea (Drumright), Secret, 09 May 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, pp.77-78.

⁵⁰ The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk), 25 May 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.88.

One week later, Muccio again cabled Rusk concerning the travel plans of senior Government officials. Muccio felt that the tendency of officials to visit Japan, but not Korea, gave 'credence to Korean fear and suspicion that the US is more interested in developing and sustaining their recent enemy than their long friends! For example, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff visited Tokyo, although the President of Korea invited them to visit Seoul none of them came'. On a separate occasion, after learning that Secretary of Defence Johnson would visit Tokyo but not Seoul, President Rhee 'was much distressed...he had become depressed and angered at what he took to be not only a slight to Korea but important that the US Department of Defense was showing its indifference to the fate of Korea'.⁵¹ Seen from Seoul, American policy toward Japan contrasted significantly with that toward the Republic of Korea.

Throughout 1949 and the first half of 1950, Korean fears of abandonment were inspired, and then bolstered, by a number of events. Several events directly concern the US-Korea relationship. The withdrawal of US troops in 1949, the exclusion of Korea from the defensive line, Connally's remarks concerning Korea's unimportance and Washington DC's unwillingness to provide a security guarantee all gave Rhee good reason to doubt America's security reliability.

But a second category of events—America's actions toward Japan and Nationalist China—influenced Rhee's perceptions of American reliability and provide support for hypothesis 1. Royall's statement, which cast doubt on America's obligation to defend Japan, seemed to have a significant impact on Rhee. He lamented US vacillation over the issue of Formosa, believing that although Korea might receive more support if it was attacked, it too was unlikely to be directly defended by the US military. Truman's declaration that the US would cease to support the Chinese Nationalists only intensified these fears. Other factors—such as the omission of Korea from many official statements and the reluctance of senior officials to visit Seoul—added insult to injury, especially given that Japan was regularly mentioned and visited. Rhee could observe a clear difference could be observed between the way the US treated Korea and the way it treated Japan, and following Acheson's press club speech, which articulated a firm commitment to the defense of Japan, he concluded that the US would defend Japan but probably provide lesser support to Korea.

As predicted by hypothesis 2, these observations influenced Korea's balancing behaviour throughout this period. Unable to boost its own defence capabilities due to a woeful economic situation, Korea attempted to improve its situation by obtaining a security guarantee from the United States. When Rhee's initial pleas fell on deaf ears he sought to blackmail the US into providing assistance, but this only strengthened American determination to not provide such a guarantee. Rebuffed by Acheson, Rhee encouraged efforts towards a wider 'Pacific Pact' that might provide a regional front against Communist aggression, and even considered security cooperation with Japan.

⁵¹ The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk), 01 June 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.97.

Case study 2: Japanese observations of the US-Korea and US-Formosa relationships

While America's policy toward Korea was largely settled, there was significant debate within the Truman administration about the nature of America's commitment to Japan and whether a peace treaty should be concluded. The Acting Political Adviser in Japan, William Sebald, felt that Royall's statement could not have been 'better designed to revive Japanese interest in the possibility or desirability of an orientation towards the Soviets, particularly in the light of recent events on the continent of Asia'. It struck a 'heavy blow to America's prestige in Japan and possibly in the Far East generally'.⁵²

The State Department felt that 'the early conclusion of a peace settlement' was the best chance to cement Japan's orientation as a pro-Western, anti-Communist nation.⁵³ They were particularly concerned that the Defense Department's desire for military bases throughout Japan would 'constitute an irritating and not a stabilizing influence on the Japanese population'.⁵⁴ Though the need to maintain US forces in Japan would complicate efforts to conclude an overall peace, a British official had earlier suggested that America's security needs in Japan could be met through 'a US-Japanese bilateral pact providing for post-treaty US base facilities in Japan in return for US protection of Japan'.⁵⁵

These internal disagreements would persist into early 1950. When it emerged that Acheson had convinced President Truman to stop providing support to the Chinese Nationalists, some Republican critics labelled this 'a final betrayal and sellout of an American ally'.⁵⁶ From the Pentagon's perspective, this decision to abandon Formosa only increased the value of bases on Japanese soil. Fearing that a peace treaty with Japan would lead to the loss of these bases, Defense officials discounted diplomatic advice that Japan was eager for the occupation to end. The Secretary of Defense, Louis Johnson, was convinced that 'the only propaganda for a peace treaty was that which came out of the Department of State'.⁵⁷

The Japanese also appeared to fear an early withdrawal that would not permit for some US forces to remain in Japan, thus providing security assurance in the Far East. In August 1949 Sebald cabled Acheson, noting that many Japanese feared that a US 'withdrawal would open wide the flood-gates of Communism. They point to what happened in China, and reinforce their position by saying

⁵² The Acting Political Adviser in Japan (Sebald) to the Secretary of State, Secret, 12 February 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, the Far East and Australasia, p.649.

⁵³ Department of State Comments on NSC 49 (June 15, 1949), Top Secret, 30 September 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, the Far East and Australasia, p.872.

⁵⁴ Department of State Comments on NSC 49 (June 15, 1949), Top Secret, 30 September 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, the Far East and Australasia, p.873.

⁵⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr Marshall Green of the Division of Northeast Asian Affairs, Secret, 09 September 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, the Far East and Australasia, p.854.

⁵⁶ Schonberger, Howard, *Aftermath of War: Americans and the Remaking of Japan, 1945-1952*, Kent State University Press: Kent, OH, 1989, p.240.

⁵⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Special Assistant to the Secretary (Howard), Top Secret, 24 April 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VI, East Asia and the Pacific, p.1178.

that our military withdrawal from Korea has made Soviet control of all Korea inevitable'. Sebald felt a withdrawal of US troops from Japan meant that the US 'might lose considerable prestige not just in Japan, but in the far East as a whole', and that 'any withdrawal must accordingly be accompanied by a serious publicity campaign to counteract the thought that the United States is "writing off" Japan as we have in effect the Chinese National Government'.⁵⁸

As expected by hypothesis 1, Sebald's remarks show that Japan observed America's treatment of Taiwan and Korea and was, as a result, apprehensive about America's security reliability. As predicted by hypothesis 2, Japan would soon pursue a policy that would strongly mitigate the risk of American abandonment.

Although the Japanese Prime Minister, Shigeru Yoshida, desired a peace treaty that avoided the retention of US bases throughout Japan's islands, he felt that hosting some bases was 'preferable to an indefinite continuation of the Occupation'.⁵⁹ He dispatched trusted officials to visit Washington DC to discuss the conclusion of a peace treaty and an end to the occupation. In a meeting with US officials on 02 May 1950, Hayato Ikeda, the Japanese Finance Minister,

*conveyed a personal message from Prime Minister Yoshida to Mr Dodge to the effect that the Government desires the earliest possible treaty. As such a treaty would require the maintenance of U.S. forces to secure the treaty terms and for other purposes, if the U.S. Government hesitates to make these conditions, the Japanese Government will try to find a way to offer them.*⁶⁰

Ikeda stated that in considering this offer, Japan had paid close attention to Royall's statement, but noted that 'Emphasis had been given [to] this by later public statements of the United States Government in writing off Formosa...[and] the fact that South Korea is not strong and could, perhaps, easily be abandoned'. Japan had observed America's behaviour towards Korea and Formosa and was concerned that they could suffer a similar fate: 'The Japanese people are desperately looking for firm ground...They were sceptical on just what and when and where the United States would stand firm, and particularly with respect to Japan'.⁶¹ Some writers argue the issue of Nationalist China held special significance for Japan. Thomas Christensen notes that 'In the Taiwan case in particular, the arguments within the American government about the island's limited strategic importance seemed to carry direct implications for Japanese

⁵⁸ The Acting Political Adviser in Japan (Sebald) to the Secretary of State, Top Secret, 20 August 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VII, the Far East and Australasia, pp.836-837.

⁵⁹ Schonberger, *Aftermath of War*, p.244.

⁶⁰ The Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of the Army (Reid) to the Assistant Secretary of State (Butterworth), Top Secret, 10 May 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VI, East Asia and the Pacific, pp.1195-1196.

⁶¹ The Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of the Army (Reid) to the Assistant Secretary of State (Butterworth), Top Secret, 10 May 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VI, East Asia and the Pacific, pp.1196.

observers about the strategic status of the island nation of Japan in the eyes of Americans'.⁶²

But unlike Rhee, with his incessant demands for a security alliance, Yoshida's envoy brought a significant offer to the table. Whilst some might argue that Rhee could have been invoking a comparison to Formosa in order to purposefully engage American "prestige" or provoke fears of how American behaviour might damage how other states viewed its security reliability, Yoshida was so clearly disturbed by the prospect of American unreliability that he was willing to make a significant concession in order to improve US-Japan security cooperation. His was a decision that would be unarguably unpopular in Japan, and thus was very unlikely to have been made solely for rhetorical, posturing or bargaining purposes. Ikeda had no motive to deceitfully invoke the issue of American steadfastness when explaining Japan's willingness to host American bases. His offer was an attempt to remind and convince America that it had a strong strategic interest in the defense of Japan, and that it could realize and codify the convergent interests shared by Tokyo and Washington D.C. by concluding peace and security treaties with Japan.

But events on the Korean Peninsula would soon influence Japan's concerns in the opposite direction. In May 1950 Japan feared American abandonment, but mere months later Japan would react to the entrapment risks posed by conflict on the Korean Peninsula. As my hypotheses predict, Japan's observations of the US-Korea relationship would soon prompt Tokyo to ameliorate these new entrapment risks by avoiding entanglement in the Korean War.

On 25 June 1950, North Korean forces launched an invasion of South Korea. Unlike previous forays across the 38th parallel, this attack was a concerted effort. On the first day of the attack, it was assessed that North Korea had 'engaged in all-out offensive to subjugate South Korea'.⁶³ President Truman's 27 June decisions to defend Korea from Communist aggression, and protect the Chinese Nationalists on Formosa, dispelled any uncertainty about America's commitment to Asian security. Although many in the US Government had sought to avoid any security commitment on the Asian mainland, Truman redrew America's defensive line to incorporate both Seoul and Taipei. This decision was prompted, in part, by the belief that the abandonment of Korea would have fundamentally—perhaps fatally—damaged regional perceptions of American reliability.

In late June this sentiment was common among US officials. An intelligence assessment warned that 'Soviet military domination of all Korea would give

⁶² Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith*, p.39. Christensen notes that different areas of the US Government drew different conclusions about Yoshida's message – one was that 'the fall of Taiwan would be viewed in Tokyo as a sign of failed American resolve', the other interpretation was that the similarities between Taiwan and Japan (islands, anti-Communist, etc) meant that Americans would regard their strategic value in the same way. Both possibilities support the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 2.

⁶³ Memorandum of Teletype Conference, Prepared in the Department of the Army, Top Secret, 25 June 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.136.

Moscow an important weapon...in connection with Japan's future alignment'. Analysts believed that Japan would 'regard the position taken by the United States as presaging US action should Japan be threatened with invasion' and that inaction in Korea would 'strengthen [an] existing widespread desire for neutrality'. Beyond Japan, a US abandonment of Korea would create the impression in Southeast Asia that 'the USSR is advancing invincibly, and there would be a greatly increased impulse to "get on the bandwagon"'. For the Chinese Nationalists, 'a US withdrawal from Korea would be all the more severe. The tendency for flight or defection to the Communists would increase'.⁶⁴ A 'high-level State-Defense conference' in Washington DC felt that 'the United States could not meet the situation with half measures. It either had to take a stand and stick to it or take no stand at all'.⁶⁵

Despite the efforts of US planners to avoid a military commitment on the Asian mainland, the invasion of South Korea—and the fact that American abandonment would have second-order effects on other nations, which feared American retrenchment—meant that the Communist aggression required a forceful response. In a meeting on 25 June attended by President Truman, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley, said that 'we must draw the line somewhere', and that the 'Korean situation offered as good an occasion for action in drawing the line as anywhere else'.⁶⁶ John Swenson-Wright argues that 'Uncomfortable memories of...Munich in 1938, as well as the need to preserve American prestige and reassure allies, persuaded the Truman administration to respond swiftly and decisively to the crisis'.⁶⁷

In a meeting on 26 June attended by President Truman and other key decision-makers, Acheson offered a plan of action focussed on direct US involvement in Korea, the use of the 7th Fleet to both protect and restrain the Chinese Nationalists on Formosa, and increased aid to both the Philippines and Indochina. A UN resolution would be drafted and presented to the Security Council on 27 June.⁶⁸ Despite its desire to avoid any defense commitments in mainland Asia, the US now found itself committed to the defense of South Korea.

As US policymakers hoped, the decision to defend South Korea influenced views of American reliability throughout the region. On 30 June, Acheson updated all US diplomatic missions on the regional reaction, reporting 'Widespread support' for America's decision to defend South Korea. 'Pessimism and gloom in

⁶⁴ Intelligence Estimate Prepared by the Estimates Group, Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State, Secret, 25 June 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, pp.148-154.

⁶⁵ See Editorial Note, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.143. This is based upon notes made by the US State Department spokesperson, Mr. Lincoln White. The regional consequences of abandoning Korea are also addressed (using different sources) in Foot, Rosemary, *The Wrong War: American Policy and the Dimensions of the Korean Conflict, 1950-1953*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp.59-60.

⁶⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup), Top Secret, 25 June 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.158.

⁶⁷ Swenson-Wright, John, *Unequal Allies? United States Security and Alliance Policy toward Japan, 1945-1960*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p.43.

⁶⁸ See Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup), Top Secret, 26 June 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, pp.178-183.

Philippines] have been succeeded by vigorous approval US actions which viewed as support of democracy in Asia'.⁶⁹ A week later, Acheson reported that 'Jap officials wholeheartedly behind US action Korea according [to] USPolAd, who has received confidential msgs from Emperor expressing gratitude'.⁷⁰ On 28 July, Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies met with President Truman and said that 'Australia was wholeheartedly behind American policy and wished to play its full part in the defense of the free world'.⁷¹

Having observed America's commitment to Korea, it was Japan's balancing behaviour proved the greatest surprise to US officials. Japan had earlier outlined their fears of US abandonment and secretly conceded a willingness to host US forces. But the US intervention in Korea changed their calculations: now that Japanese leaders had a better assessment of American reliability—that is, its capabilities and interests in Northeast Asia—Tokyo could afford to drive a harder bargain on the issue of US bases in Japan. On 29 July 1950 Prime Minister Yoshida—in contradiction of the May base offer—told a parliamentary committee that he was 'against leasing bases to any foreign country'. This position puzzled some US officials, who found it 'mystifying in view of the Korean war which has pointed out the true character of Communist aggression and the need for first-class armament and bases to stave off aggression'.⁷²

Sebald, in Tokyo, saw this in a slightly different light, assessing that Prime Minister Yoshida was 'laying the groundwork for future bargaining'.⁷³ The head of Japanese Affairs in the State Department later adopted Sebald's perspective. Because the Japanese now knew that 'US bases in Japan will prove a critical factor in protecting the whole US position in the Far East...it would be logical for the Japanese (who have never hesitated to play power politics on a grand scale) to intimate that the price for these all-important bases in Japan is greater than the US had perhaps reckoned'.⁷⁴

This policy reversal highlights the full significance of Japan's secret offer to host US bases in May 1950. This offer, which was prompted largely by concerns over America's security reliability, was placed in abeyance as soon as Japanese officials observed that America's willingness to defend Korea made it a far more reliable security partner for Tokyo. But as Swenson-Wright notes, once China entered the Korean War in late 1950 'Almost overnight, the whole character of the war changed. Washington and Allied capitals were gripped by a sense of

⁶⁹ The Secretary of State to All Diplomatic Missions and Certain Consular Offices, Secret, 30 June 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.255.

⁷⁰ The Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic and Consular Offices, Secret, 06 July 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.310.

⁷¹ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, Top Secret, 28 July 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Vol VII, Korea, p.489.

⁷² Memorandum by the Officer in Charge of Japanese Affairs (Green) to the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (Allison), Secret, 02 August 1950, pp.1262-1263.

⁷³ Telegram 294 from Tokyo, by Sebald, 01 August 1950. As quoted in Memorandum by the Officer in Charge of Japanese Affairs (Green) to the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (Allison), Secret, 02 August 1950, p.1263.

⁷⁴ Memorandum by the Officer in Charge of Japanese Affairs (Green) to the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (Allison), Secret, 02 August 1950, p.1264.

crisis and the Korean War, until then an apparently limited conflict, was now seen as the possible prelude to World War III'.⁷⁵ America's response to the Korean War had demonstrated to Tokyo that they need not fear abandonment, but America's defense of Korea against Chinese forces now began to pose risks of entrapment to Japan.

In January 1951 John Foster Dulles was appointed as an Ambassador and Truman assigned him responsibility to conclude not only a peace treaty with Japan, but also a 'mutual assistance arrangement among the Pacific island nations (Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Japan, the United States, and perhaps Indonesia)'.⁷⁶ He arrived in Japan in January 1951 order to discuss the World War II peace treaty with Prime Minister Yoshida, but was frustrated by Yoshida's attempts to evade discussion of US bases in Japan and the development of a strong Japanese military.

Michael Schaller attributes Yoshida's new position on US bases to events on the Peninsula: Dulles soon 'learned that American military reversals in Korea had, as he feared, stiffened the prime minister's spine'.⁷⁷ Because the intervention in Korea had, effectively, redrawn the American defensive line in Asia, Yoshida now had some indication of just how valuable Japanese real estate was to American strategists. But he was also fearful that the US would push Japan to quickly rearm so that it could contribute to American-led operations in Asia. Yoshida warned Dulles that 'it was necessary to go very slowly in connection with any possible rearmament' due to the risks of resurgent militarism and the economic cost of such a decision. Dulles insisted that 'Japan should be willing to make at least a token contribution and a commitment to a general cause of collective security', but Yoshida was unwilling to discuss the specifics of rearmament.⁷⁸ As Walter LaFeber writes, Yoshida 'seemed obsessed by the fear that Americans wanted Japanese troops to be used in Korea and elsewhere'.⁷⁹

Yoshida's vague responses vexed Dulles. After another discussion on 31 January, Dulles insisted that Japan must create a small army and 'Until Yoshida accepted his position, Dulles declined to discuss the terms of the peace treaty'.⁸⁰ In early February Yoshida 'secretly agreed to creating limited ground forces', and although, at 50 000 men, it was not the size Dulles has desired, it was a sufficient sign of good faith.⁸¹ The draft of a bilateral agreement, which could be signed following the peace treaty, noted that 'Japan desires...that the United States....should maintain armed forces of its own in and about Japan so as to

⁷⁵ Swenson-Wright, *Unequal Allies?*, p.57.

⁷⁶ Enclosure 2 to The Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense (Marshall), Top Secret, 09 January 1951, in FRUS, 1951, Vol VI, East Asia and the Pacific, p.789.

⁷⁷ Schaller, *Altered States*, p.34.

⁷⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Deputy to the Consultant (Allison), Secret, 29 January 1951, in FRUS, 1951, Vol VI, East Asia and the Pacific, p.829.

⁷⁹ LaFeber, *The Clash*, p.299.

⁸⁰ Schaller, *Altered States*, p.35.

⁸¹ LaFeber, *The Clash*, p.291. See also Schaller, *Altered States*, p.36 and the Editorial Note in FRUS, 1951, Vol VI, East Asia and the Pacific, p.849.

deter armed attack upon Japan'.⁸² One author has argued that although this agreement contained only 'a vague promise to defend Japan...after Truman's massive response in Korea...no sane person doubted how U.S. forces would reach if Japan were attacked'.⁸³ Yoshida agreed to develop a military force in Japan, but 'its modest size and flexible timetable made it unsuitable for early foreign deployment—say, in Korea'.⁸⁴

Japan's policies throughout this period provide strong support for both hypotheses. Prior to the Korean War, Japan—fearing abandonment—offered basing rights to the US in order to improve Japan's security situation. When making this offer, Ikeda specifically noted that American behaviour toward Korea and Nationalist China was a key influence on Japanese thinking. Later, after America's defense of Korea demonstrated that it would also defend Japan, but at a time when China's involvement in the war threatened escalation into a global conflict, Japan feared entrapment and backtracked from its earlier position. Though Yoshida did agree to host US bases, he managed to rebuff Dulles' demands that Japan rearm quickly. These examples show how Japan's observations of the US-Korea relationship let Tokyo to balance in response to its specific fears about American reliability: when they feared abandonment, they sought a tighter commitment from the US, but when they feared entrapment, they sought to minimise this risk by creating only a small military force.

Was there an alliance audience effect?

Between 1951 and 1954, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines and the Republic of China all signed military alliance treaties with the United States. However likely these may appear in hindsight, such an outcome was by no means preordained. America was not always viewed as a reliable security partner in Asia and until it intervened in Korea, uncertainty over America's security posture in Asia was a paralysing force.

Hypothesis 1 posits that a state's behaviour toward one ally will influence the reliability perceptions of other allies, and the empirical evidence above supports this prediction. Uncertainty about American intent amplified conditions of insecurity in Asia – to better understand America's interests, Korea watched US conduct toward Taiwan and Japan, while Japan watched US conduct toward Korea and Taiwan. Japanese and Korean perceptions of America's security reliability declined as it abandoned Taiwan and withdrew from Korea, but improved once the US redrew its defensive line and demonstrated that it would indeed assist Asian nations in defending against the Communist threat.

My second hypothesis predicts that if a state perceives its ally to be unreliable, it will adopt balancing behaviour that mitigates this unreliability. Such behaviour was clearly observable throughout 1949 – 1951. Having observed America abandon the Chinese Nationalists, Korea did all it could to attract a stronger

⁸² Unsigned Draft of Bilateral Agreement, Secret, 05 February 1951, in FRUS, 1951, Vol VI, East Asia and the Pacific, p.856.

⁸³ LaFeber, *The Clash*, p.291.

⁸⁴ Schaller, *Altered States*, p.36

security commitment, and when these efforts failed it tried to form new security relationships with other Asian countries. Japan, having observed America “write off” China and fearing that they would likewise abandon Korea, demonstrated its willingness to adopt costly external balancing behaviour by offering the US bases throughout Japan. However, once the US intervened in the Korean War and Japan’s acute fears of abandonment were replaced by moderate fears of entrapment. This let Yoshida to adopt a harder bargaining position. Both of these developments are consistent with hypothesis 2.

Summary of alliance audience effect theory and case study examination:

State	What alliance did the state monitor?	Did observations affect perceptions of reliability?	Did the state balance?
	Hypothesis 1		
	Hypothesis 2		
Japan	US-South Korea (pre-Korean War)	Yes – Japan was spooked by the US withdrawal	Yes – offered bases to the US
Japan	US-Taiwan	Yes – America’s unwillingness to defend anti-Communist island nation cast further doubt US willingness to defend Japan	Yes – offered bases to the US
Japan	US-South Korea (post-Korean War)	Yes – Japan reassured by the decision to defend Korea.	Yes – now fearing entrapment on the Korean Peninsula, Japan bargained hard and rebuffed pressure to rearm early
South Korea	US-Japan	Yes – Rhee felt the Royall statement meant that Japan would not be defended, and if Japan wouldn’t be defended, then neither would Korea	Yes – sought to blackmail US into alliance, sought anti-Communist alliances with other Asian nations
South Korea	US-Taiwan	Yes – Rhee feared State Department ‘vacillation’ over Taiwan would be repeated if the RoK was threatened	Yes – persisted in external balancing efforts (the pursuit of new allies)

Conclusion

These findings suggest that interactions within one relationship, if they are observable, occur in front of an “alliance audience”. The fact that these allies then adopted specific forms of balancing behaviour suggests that the “alliance audience effect” exists and can be quite influential. Perhaps the best example is that Japan’s decision-making—both in offering bases to US forces, and then to refusing to create a large defense force—was significantly influenced by Tokyo’s observations of American behaviour within the US-Korea and US-China relationships.

What are the implications for Asia today? The first is that just like it did in the Cold War, the US will have to manage each alliance with an awareness of interdependencies within Asia. Minor examples of this interdependence have already come to light: when the US affirmed that the disputed territory of the Senkaku Islands fell under the US-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty, the President of the Philippines issued a statement which hinted that the Philippines ‘expects to get the same assurance that the US had given Japan when faced with a similar conflict with China’.⁸⁵ Just like they did in the 1949-1951 period, US allies will observe how America treats its other allies and be concerned that inconsistent behaviour across different alliance commitments suggests divergent strategic interests.

Likewise, inaction could have regional effects. In 2012, when China and the Philippines clashed over ownership of the Scarborough Shoal, America’s response was muted. The Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, simply noted that ‘We are opposed to the threat or use of force by any party to advance its claim’ and pledged to ‘remain in close contact with our ally, the Philippines’.⁸⁶ This tepid response probably did not go unnoticed by Japan, which is currently concerned about America’s willingness to defend against a Chinese effort to seize the Senkaku Islands.

More recently, in April 2014, there were unconfirmed reports that United States military assets had assisted in efforts to resupply the *Sierra Madre*, a Filipino vessel that was deliberately wrecked onto the Second Thomas Shoal, despite attempts by the People’s Republic of China to prevent the resupply.⁸⁷ Such efforts, if true, could be very reassuring to Japan. They might demonstrate the strength of common interests, whereas words—even when they come from senior decision-makers or Presidents—are cheap by comparison. In simple terms, actions such as these would demonstrate that the interests which underpinned an alliance signed decades ago are still convergent. By contrast, mere words could be concealing the decomposing corpse of an alliance.

⁸⁵ Porcalla, Delon, ‘Palace hopes US will defend Phl in sea row’, *The Philippine Star*, 10 February 2014, accessed at < <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2014/02/10/1288626/palace-hopes-us-will-defend-phl-sea-row> >

⁸⁶ ‘U.S. Reaffirms Defense of Philippines in Standoff With China’, *The New York Times*, 01 May 2012.

⁸⁷ ‘AFP uses couriers to foil China spies’, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 29 April 2014. See also ‘Obama runs China’s pivot gauntlet’, *Asia Times Online*, 22 April 2014.

The evidence presented in this article suggests that a state's behaviour within one alliance can influence the reliability perceptions of other allies, and that these allies will act to mitigate the risk posed by their unreliable ally. My hypotheses require further testing across a range of scenarios, alliances and time periods, but this initial examination suggests that a state's behaviour can have an alliance audience effect. In the Cold War examples assessed above, US policymakers instinctively understood this interdependence and tried to ensure their actions in one alliance would not negatively affect other alliances. This dynamic will almost certainly be of immense policy relevance over the next few decades.

Other factors also warrant further study. Do these hypotheses hold true when two allied states share different adversaries? How are these dynamics affected by geography – was Australia, located far from Korea, less concerned than Japan because of this physical distance? Does the nature of a security commitment matter: are these dynamics stronger within formal military alliances than more informal security partnerships or alignments? Can a state deliberately create the impression of unreliability in order to prompt one of its allies to adopt a particular form of balancing behaviour? How do states avoid the danger that an ally may deliberately attempt to manipulate its reliability image? Finally, although in these case studies Korea and Japan balanced with the US against the threat of Communism, this outcome was not guaranteed. The nexus between the balancing and bandwagoning debate, and the issue of alliance audience effects, is a promising area of policy-relevant research.

With several regions of the world currently clamouring for US leadership, it might be convenient to dismiss concerns about America's reliability as the efforts of deceitful allies seeking to free ride on American military power. This article does not argue that the US should remain captive to the concerns of its allies – in some cases, the second-order effects of this alliance interdependence may be negligible, or perhaps even advantageous for the United States. However, this article does show that America's actions in Asia matter: they affect the beliefs and behaviour of allies, influencing them toward particular defense and diplomatic policies. US policymakers should not discount allied perspectives on American reliability, but rather carefully consider the importance of interdependence between these alliances.