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Alliances as a Restraining Tool:

U.S. Alliances with South Korea and Taiwan, 1952-54

Abstract: When do states choose to stop their allies from going to war with third-party states, and when are they willing to let the allies have their way, unopposed? Building on the literature, I hypothesize that states will be more likely to restrain allies when they fear being pulled into conflicts of little strategic value, when the alliance relationship is underinstitutionalized, and when allies do not share common political and ideological values. Case studies on U.S. relations with South Korea and Taiwan between 1952 and 1954 show how the U.S. made use of defense treaties as a tool to rein in the allies seeking to engage in conflict with their communist adversaries. The case studies support the link between security concerns and decisions to restrain. Institutionalization plays a relatively marginal role, and political and ideological affinity fails to explain restraining behavior.