

“The Insular Advantage: Geography and the Durability of American Alliances”

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Abstract: President Donald Trump has not been shy about playing hard-ball with close allies. This has led to concerns that Trump poses a unique threat to American alliances. Theoretically, these concerns are consistent with an influential line of argument that points to strategic restraint and reassurance – via binding institutions - as what sets American alliances apart. The fact of the matter is that Trump is not the first American president to play hard-ball with close allies, which leads to a two-part puzzle: What explains the United States’ track record of alliance coercion? And how has its alliance network remained so robust, given this track record? Our argument centers on geography, specifically the fact that the United States is the insular power *par excellence*. Insularity, we argue, affords the United States two strategic advantages. First, it is free to roam. Second, it is an attractive security provider for states in geopolitically crowded neighborhoods. Together, these advantages account for the United States’ track record of alliance coercion, as well as the limited damage that has been done to core alliances in the process. We demonstrate the value-added of our argument with a case study from the early Cold War, during NATO’s formative period.

From his election campaign onward, President Donald Trump has not been shy about playing hard-ball with even close allies. This has led to concerns that Trump poses a unique threat to American alliances. The concern is especially acute in the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States’ mainstay alliance in Europe. Rather than underline NATO’s value, as his predecessors have done, Trump has embraced the possibility that the United States might exit the alliance at some point in order to wring concessions on issues of interest such as allied defense spending and terms of trade.¹ Trump’s critics fear that his hard-ball tactics will drive a wedge between the United States and its European partners, endangering the transatlantic alliance. Theoretically, this critique is consistent with an influential line of

argument that points to institutions as what sets American alliances apart. According to this logic, the United States has gone out of its way to restrain itself and build a cooperative framework – characterized by binding institutions - that reassures weaker states like those in Europe against the twin dangers of domination and abandonment. This, in turn, has made them amenable to American leadership. “American power is made more acceptable to other states because it is institutionalized,” as John Ikenberry has argued.² By signaling such disregard for NATO as an institution, his critics claim, Trump calls into question the institutional commitments that have been at the heart of the American-led order.³

The fact of the matter is that Trump is not the first American president to play hard-ball with allies, even close allies like those in NATO.⁴ At the height of the Cold War, for example, the United States coerced West Germany into renouncing nuclear weapons, threatening to abandon it if it acquired an independent deterrent; other allies threatened with sanctions or abandonment to discourage them from proliferating include Israel, Taiwan, South Korea, and Pakistan.⁵ Far from precluding domination and abandonment, institutionalized alliances have provided the backdrop against which the United States has engaged in hard bargaining with its partners, using pressure when needed to get its way. Just as importantly, American alliances have endured despite this track record of coercion. Today, the United States’ alliance network spans five continents and includes sixty-six countries, which together contain 25 percent of the world’s population and account for nearly 75 percent of global economic output.⁶

This leads to a two-part puzzle: What explains the United States’ track record of alliance coercion? And how has its alliance network remained so robust, given that the strategic restraint and reassurance emphasized by institutionalists have been lacking at key moments? Our argument centers on geography, specifically the fact that the United States is the insular power

par excellence. Insularity – by which we mean the fact that a state is the only great power on a large body of land that is surrounded on all sides by water – affords the United States two strategic advantages.⁷ First, it is free to roam – secure at home, the United States is able to project power abroad in ways that other major powers can only aspire to.⁸ Second, the United States is an attractive security provider for states in geopolitically crowded neighborhoods, with distance rendering American power less threatening and thus more tolerable than local alternatives.⁹

Together, these advantages account for the United States' track record of alliance coercion, as well as the limited damage that has been done to core alliances in the process. Namely, being free to roam, the United States can credibly threaten to leave even geopolitically sensitive regions. At the same time, it remains an attractive security provider for local states when engaged. This has allowed the United States to push for diplomatic and military deals that protect its prerogatives at the expense of allies even while preserving – and expanding – its alliance network. The primary implication is that American alliance relations have been characterized by more coercion – and less restraint and reassurance – than institutionalists have cared to emphasize. Paradoxically, this suggests that the United States' alliance network is more robust than Trump's critics fear.

The rest of the article fleshes out these points. First, we contrast the institutionalist explanation for the durability of American alliances with our own, geography-centered account. Second, we demonstrate the value-added of our argument with a case study from the early Cold War, during NATO's formative period. The case study shows that the United States has been able to take advantage of its privileged geographic position to drive hard bargains with even

close allies, cementing its position in NATO in the process. Finally, we conclude by deriving an important implication for policy: less reassurance can be more.

Accounting for America's Durable Alliances: Institutions vs. Insularity

What explains the durability of American alliances? A prominent line of argument points to institutions as what sets American alliances apart. As John Ikenberry, in particular, has argued, the United States has had to engage in strategic restraint in order to reassure weaker states that it would not dominate or abandon them.¹⁰ Otherwise, they would have incentives to balance against American power. Strategic restraint, in turn, has been possible because of the binding effects of international institutions. Institutions, Ikenberry argues, serve to “reduce the returns to power,” or limit the extent to which powerful actors like the United States can “win” in the short term, which makes weaker actors more amenable to their leadership in the long term. As a liberal democracy, the United States has been uniquely well positioned to engage in strategic restraint and bind itself via institutions; this explains the persistence of American-led alliances. “American power,” according to Ikenberry, “is not only unprecedented in its preponderance but it is also unprecedented in the way it is manifest within and through institutions. This helps explain why it has been so durable.”¹¹

The institutionalist argument is intuitive and plausible on its own terms. However, it has difficulty accounting for the empirical anomalies flagged above. Namely, the United States has not been bound sufficiently by institutions to preclude hard bargaining with even its closest allies. This raises serious doubts about whether strategic restraint and reassurance have been the key to durable American alliances. It is thus worth considering factors other than institutions that may have contributed to the durability of American alliances.

To this end, we argue that insufficient attention has been paid to geography. Geography has long been recognized as one of the “structural modifiers” that affects how states interact in anarchy.¹² Insularity, in particular, is commonly discussed as a constraint on expansion. For defensive realists, geography influences the severity of the security dilemma, with insularity advantaging the defense relative to the offense. Robert Jervis lays out the key elements of the argument in his seminal treatment of the security dilemma: “Anything that increases the amount of ground the attacker has to cross, or impedes his progress across it, or makes him more vulnerable while crossing, increases the advantage accruing to the defense. When states are separated by barriers that produce these effects, the security dilemma is eased, since both can have forces adequate for defense without being able to attack.”¹³ Oceans serve the same function as buffer zones in this respect; if all states were islands, Jervis argues, anarchy would be much less of a problem.

Importantly, offensive realists converge with defensive realists on the defense-dominance of insularity. The fact that large bodies of water sharply limit states’ ability to project power explains why great powers can aspire to regional hegemony at best, despite the fact that they would be more powerful and thus more secure as global hegemons.¹⁴ Because of the stopping power of water, in Mearsheimer’s words, “there has never been a global hegemon, and there is not likely to be one anytime soon.”¹⁵ By foreclosing the possibility of global hegemony, insularity adds an element of defense to an international system otherwise primed for offense.¹⁶

In short, there is a fair degree of consensus in realist circles that insularity is a constraint on expansion. Less attention has been paid, however, to how insularity might *enable* the projection of power and influence. Here, it is significant that other states have feared American abandonment much more than domination.¹⁷ Building on this insight, we argue that the United

States has been able to exploit this asymmetry to its advantage, pushing for diplomatic and military deals that protect its prerogatives at the expense of allies even while preserving – and expanding – its alliance network. In this telling, insular powers like the U.S. may eschew conquest, consistent with the stopping power of water, but that does not mean as a general rule that they are any less able to expand than their continental counterparts.¹⁸ What is distinctive, in other words, is the insular *mode* of expansion, which is indirect and depends on cultivating spheres of influence, playing to geographic advantages. Perhaps the stopping power of water can be overcome after all – not by conquest but by invitation.

Durable American alliances, consistent with this logic, follow naturally from the United States' geographical position as the insular power *par excellence*. Unrivaled in its hemisphere and separated from the world's other major powers by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the United States is exceptionally secure, perhaps the most secure great power in history.¹⁹ Jules Jusseraud, French ambassador to the United States from 1902 to 1925, summed up the matter pithily when he observed that America is “blessed among the nations. On the north, she had a weak neighbor; on the south, another weak neighbor; on the east, fish, and the west, fish.”²⁰ It is the strategic flexibility afforded by insularity, we argue, that underpins durable American alliances. Insularity, specifically, translates into two advantages for the United States as it engages in alliance politics abroad: it is free to roam and it is an attractive security provider for states in geopolitically crowded neighborhoods. We elaborate on each here.

Freedom to Roam

First, insularity gives the United States a baseline level of security that makes it free to roam abroad. The fact that the United States is surrounded by large bodies of water means that the risk of attack and invasion is minimal, even in the face of threats from hostile great powers.²¹

As a regional hegemon, moreover, the United States by definition lacks local challengers.²² This surplus of security gives the United States strategic flexibility; it means that it can project power abroad without needing to worry much about defending itself at home. As Mearsheimer puts it, “Most Americans never think about it, but one of the main reasons the United States is able to station military forces all around the globe and intrude in the politics of virtually every region is that it faces no serious threats in the Western Hemisphere. If the United States had dangerous foes in its own backyard, it would be much less capable of roaming into distant regions.”²³ It is exactly because the United States is an insular power, in other words, that it can afford to be a global power. The United States can be usefully contrasted in this respect with the string of continental great powers that have failed in their attempts to gain regional hegemony and have thus been unable to realize their global ambitions.²⁴ A rising China faces similar constraints today in breaking out of its neighborhood in East Asia.²⁵

The United States is not the only insular power to have benefitted from the freedom to roam. In its heyday, Great Britain was able to focus on empire-building overseas in good part because of the protection afforded by the English Channel and the maintenance of a balance of power on the European continent.²⁶ As an insular power *and* regional hegemon, however, the United States’ freedom to roam has been incomparably greater. If the United States was not a regional hegemon, presumably it would devote more of its strategic effort to maintaining its position in the Western Hemisphere. Instead, national security has taken on a broad meaning for Americans, with “the protection of core values at home requiring the creation of an external environment friendly and nonthreatening to U.S. interests.”²⁷ In practice, this has translated into a global role.

Unless and until a peer competitor emerges that can meddle in the Western Hemisphere and draw the United States' attention closer to home, it will continue to enjoy a freedom to roam that other great powers can only aspire to. Mearsheimer recognizes this point theoretically when he argues that a regional hegemon like the United States cannot remain indifferent to the prospect of another regional hegemon emerging on the scene. After all, a rival hegemon would be able to threaten the United States by helping to upset the balance of power in its backyard.²⁸ Even in this scenario, however, the United States would still retain considerable freedom to roam, given the low threat of invasion. What would change is the *degree* of freedom, with the United States paying relatively more attention to local threats and less to overseas ones.

Attractive Security Provider

The freedom to roam is of limited utility if states in other regions are determined to keep the United States out. Here, however, the second advantage of insularity becomes relevant: insularity sterilizes American power and renders it less threatening to others than if it were located next door.²⁹ This is because of the “loss of strength gradient” – the idea that the ability to project power declines with distance – as well as the stopping power of water.³⁰ Together, these constraints on power projection reassure others that widespread conquest is a bridge too far for even a preponderant United States. Recall, also, that the United States is free to roam exactly because it enjoys a surplus of security at home, meaning that its core security needs can be met without dominating states in other regions - even if incentives remain to project power and influence abroad. By virtue of its insular geography, in short, the United States is free to roam and project power abroad; at the same time, it is relatively non-threatening. This is exactly what makes the United States such an attractive security provider for states in geopolitically crowded neighborhoods. They feel less menaced by the United States than their neighbors, who pose a more

direct threat to their interests, while calculating that they can reap major advantages if they can get American power on their side. “The United States,” as Walt says, “has long been the perfect ally for many Eurasian states. Its power ensures that its voice is heard and its actions felt, but it lies a comfortable distance away and does not threaten to conquer its allies.”³¹

As a result, the United States finds itself readily invited into key regions, the more so when a threat to the local balance of power creates demand for an offshore counterweight. Crucially, American backing is a valuable enough commodity that local states are willing to make painful concessions to U.S. interests rather than see it follow through on threats of abandonment – threats that must be taken seriously because of the freedom to roam afforded by insularity. In this fashion, the United States can use the prospect of exit to shape the terms of its engagement, allowing it to stay abroad on favorable terms. Simply put, insularity leads to high demand for the United States as a security provider, which translates into a bargaining advantage over those who want its protection.³²

Net Effect: Durable American Alliances

Combined, the United States’ freedom to roam and attractiveness as a security provider account for its track record of alliance coercion as well as the fact that its alliances have endured despite this track record. Desired as a partner but secure enough to move offshore when deemed necessary, the United States is well positioned to shape the terms of its engagement so that its prerogatives are protected, even at the expense of allies. As already mentioned, American protection is a valuable commodity; so when local states face regional competitions for power and influence, they are willing to invite the United States in and make concessions to tempt it onshore. Once the United States is onshore, it can always threaten to move offshore if conflicts of interest with allies become intractable, unless of course additional concessions are made to U.S. interests.

Because American security assistance is so valuable, allies are generally incentivized to concede to U.S. terms rather than see it follow through on threats of abandonment. In short, insularity equips the United States with a persistent bargaining advantage in its dealings with allies. This is what allows the U.S. to engage abroad on favorable terms, to settle for little less than bargains that asymmetrically benefit it.

That said, the United States' insular advantages are more potent at some times than others, mainly because the prospect of American exit looms larger at some times than others. For this reason, we would argue, the United States' insular advantages should cast their largest shadow when American alliances are under stress. These stresses can arise when (1) allies are tempted to strike a more independent pose, for example by proliferating or by considering alternative security arrangements; or (2) there is domestic pressure in the U.S. for retrenchment. The United States' insular advantages are foregrounded in these circumstances because allies are forced to reckon with the potential consequences of a U.S. pullback.³³

A cursory review of its postwar relations shows that the United States has regularly played to its insular advantages to coerce allies, achieving notable successes when the prospect of American exit has been especially salient. Within its sphere of influence, the United States has deployed threats of exit to discourage states from proliferating, which could restrict U.S. freedom of action and complicate U.S. diplomacy. In these cases, the United States has forced its allies to choose between stopping their problematic behavior and facing a period of time before acquiring nuclear weapons in which they might be left isolated to fend off hostile neighbors. As we have already mentioned, the United States threatened to abandon West Germany in the face of the ongoing threat from the Soviet Union unless Bonn agreed to remain under the U.S. nuclear umbrella (and thus subject to U.S. influence).³⁴ A similar dynamic played out in East Asia,

where the U.S. threatened to leave Taiwan and South Korea isolated in the face of threats from China and North Korea, respectively, if they did not end their nuclear programs.³⁵

The United States has also threatened abandonment when allies expressed interest in alternative security arrangements that challenged American leadership prerogatives. Thus, confronted in the mid-1970's with French-led efforts to construct a European security identity largely independent of NATO, President Richard Nixon warned, "In the event that the Congress gets the idea that we are going to be faced with economic confrontation and hostility from [Western European nations], you will find it almost impossible to get Congressional support for continued American presence at present levels on the security front."³⁶ As Richard Moon notes, this threat of American withdrawal triggered an "immediate and conciliatory" European response.³⁷

More dramatically, as the Cold War ramped down, debates over what shape European security institutions should take next saw the United States implicitly threaten exit to remind European allies what might be lost if the U.S. abandoned the continent at Cold War's end. When, for example, it appeared in early 1990 that West Germany might loosen its relationship with NATO in return for Soviet support for German unification, the United States reminded the West German leadership – in the words of President George H.W. Bush – that "Full German membership [in NATO] is linked to our ability to sustain U.S. troops in Europe." At a time when West German leaders were hoping to work with the United States to expedite German unification, this implied threat of an American withdrawal helped ensure West German fidelity to NATO and, in turn, the dominance of the United States' preferred security system in post-Cold War Europe.³⁸

Throughout this period, domestic pressures for retrenchment amplified the United States' insular advantages. That is, when facing internal calls to reduce American engagement overseas, U.S. leaders enjoyed strong leverage in their negotiations with allied counterparts. Seeking, for example, to reduce U.S. balance of payments deficits while having the West Europeans contribute more militarily to the NATO alliance, Nixon and his Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird used mounting Congressional opposition to a large overseas presence to pressure their European counterparts into meeting U.S. interests. As Laird explained to NATO Secretary General Manlio Brosio in early 1969, there was a growing focus in the U.S. on "the kind of commitment [that] our European friends make to the Alliance in the real terms of manpower, of budgets, of dollars and cents. We had come very close, before the Czechoslovakian invasion [of 1968], to having the Majority Leader of the Senate, Senator Mansfield, pressing for reductions in Europe." While Laird "personally opposed the withdrawal of US troops from Europe [. . .] he did have a problem in going before the Senate and the House of Representatives. He had seen the sentiment for withdrawal grow."³⁹ Subsequently, several of NATO's European members agreed to increase their purchases of U.S. military equipment and strengthen their own military forces on the continent.⁴⁰ A similar situation played out in Nixon-era relations with Japan: seeking to reduce defense spending at a time of U.S. economic weakness, American negotiators used the prospect of a U.S. retrenchment from East Asia to push Japan into assuming greater responsibility for maritime security in the region.⁴¹

Insular Advantages in Action: US-NATO Relations in the Early Cold War

To demonstrate the value-added of the insularity argument, it is worth examining its explanatory power in a case that should be readily explained by its institutionalist rival. A good venue for doing so is U.S.-NATO relations in the early Cold War period, from the late 1940's to

the early 1960's. According to institutionalists, this was a period when "American power was both tied down and bound to Europe," by way of institutions like NATO. In effect, NATO served to reassure European allies that the United States would neither dominate nor abandon them.⁴² We emphasize, instead, the shadow of exit that hung over the U.S. commitment to Europe during the early Cold War. Throughout the 1950's, under Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, the United States saw its leadership role on the continent as a temporary expedient; as soon as European integration had proceeded far enough for a "third force" to emerge capable of balancing Soviet power on its own, the United States would withdraw from its forward positions and recede into the background. Moreover, the United States was not above threatening its European allies with abandonment when they failed to embrace the integration project with sufficient zeal. Most famous in this regard is the "agonizing reappraisal" that John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State under Eisenhower, warned about in December 1953. In other words, the United States sought to use its freedom to roam to leave Europe even during the most dangerous phase of the Cold War, with U.S.-Soviet tensions at their peak.

In fact, an enduring American commitment to Europe was not solidified until the early 1960's, under President John F. Kennedy.⁴³ Even Kennedy, however, threatened to withdraw all U.S. troops from Europe unless West Germany dialed back on security cooperation with France, which threatened the preponderant position that the United States demanded in the NATO alliance as the price for its staying. Kennedy's threats were successful – where the "agonizing reappraisal" was not – because they were designed not to facilitate an American withdrawal from Europe but a continuing presence on the strongest possible terms. In this way, the United States

took advantage of its freedom to roam and attractiveness as a security provider to cement its position in NATO.

In the rest of the section, we elaborate on these themes, drawing on the historiographical literature to offer a corrective to the institutionalist account. First, however, we highlight the elements of the interpretation that sync with ours.

The Problem: Abandonment, Not Domination

Ikenberry is on to something when he argues that the United States was a “reluctant hegemon” in the post-World War II period.⁴⁴ Especially important is his point that prospective allies in Europe worried more about abandonment than domination and worked hard to secure robust American security commitments, consistent with the logic laid out in this article.⁴⁵ Reluctant hegemon, however, does not go far enough: it understates how determined the United States was to leave Europe once the balance of power was restored there, underscoring its freedom to roam. As important, the emphasis on strategic restraint and reassurance glosses over cases in which the United States threatened exit in order to wrest concessions from its European partners on the terms of its engagement, most crucially in putting down the Franco-German revolt of 1963 – a full 14 years after the establishment of NATO. “American power,” according to Ikenberry, “was both tied down and bound to Europe” during the early Cold War period.⁴⁶ Our claim is that European allies had good reason to doubt the extent to which this was true, doubts which the United States fanned for its own benefit.

The U.S. Commitment to Europe: Permanent or Temporary?

NATO, to paraphrase its first Secretary General, was created in the late 1940s to “keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.”⁴⁷ What is striking is how long it took the United States to reconcile itself to this fact: it was only in the early 1960s that the

United States came to see its security commitment to Europe as more than a temporary expedient. This is a prominent theme in recent Cold War historiography, much of it inspired by Marc Trachtenberg's path-breaking account, *A Constructed Peace*.⁴⁸ James McAllister, for one, describes the idea that American military forces would permanently ensure European stability as "unthinkable" in the 1940s and 1950s. The historical record shows, instead, that "American policymakers from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Dwight Eisenhower strenuously tried to avoid having the future of Europe dependent on a permanent U.S. military presence on the continent."⁴⁹ Mark Sheetz concurs, noting, "Postwar American statesmen, such as Kennan, Dulles and Eisenhower, did not want European stability to be permanently dependent on the presence of American forces. They did not want to assume the burden of defending Europe permanently against the Soviet Union, nor did they want to serve permanently as Europe's protector against a possible resurgence of German power. The purpose of America's 'temporary' intervention in Western Europe was to eliminate the need for 'permanent' intervention."⁵⁰ In 1991 Trachtenberg himself observed, "During the crucial formative period in the early 1950s, everyone wanted a permanent American presence in Europe – everyone, that is, except the Americans themselves. It is hard to understand why the intensity and persistence of America's desire to pull out as soon as she reasonably could has never been recognized, either in the public discussion or in the scholarly literature, because it comes through with unmistakable clarity" in government documents.⁵¹

If the United States intended its commitment to Europe to be temporary, how did it propose to solve the double containment problem that was at the heart of the Cold War? That is, how did it propose "to keep the Russians out and the Germans down?" The hope was that European integration would yield a "third force" on the continent, solving the double

containment problem and allowing American forces to withdraw. McAllister, again, captures the thrust of U.S. policy: “America’s overarching goal after 1947 was to create a united Western Europe that could contain Germany and balance against the Soviet Union without a permanent U.S. military presence.” For U.S. policymakers, “Western European unity was the ‘skeleton key’ that would permanently end the German problem and enable the region to become a third great center of power able to stand on its own without U.S. military forces continually serving as either a ‘pacifier’ or ‘protector.’”⁵² Sheetz reaches similar conclusions. “The Marshall Plan and NATO,” he argues, “were designed to unify Western Europe, solve the German problem, and restore a rough balance on the European continent. The United States would then be able to relinquish responsibility for European security.”⁵³ The key point is that the United States was pulled into the NATO system only reluctantly; the goal, at least through the 1950’s, was not to stay in Europe but to leave once a “third force” had emerged.⁵⁴

The Agonizing Reappraisal

No American policymaker was more determined to leave Europe than Eisenhower. The basic concept of Eisenhower’s grand strategy, as Brendan Green relates, was the “third force”: “The United States would build Western Europe into an independent pole of power that could balance the Soviet Union by itself. The United States would then pass the buck, withdrawing its forces from the continent and positioning itself as the balancer of last resort.”⁵⁵ Eisenhower pinned his hopes, in particular, on the European Defense Community (EDC), a treaty integrating the militaries of France, West Germany, and the Benelux states. If successful, the EDC would represent a local solution to the double containment problem, harnessing West German military power against the Soviet threat but with supranational controls that would ensure that West Germany did not get too independent or powerful.⁵⁶ This in turn would free the United States

from having to make a long-term commitment to defend Europe, either from the Soviet Union or from a rearmed West Germany. For Eisenhower, avoiding such a commitment was imperative.⁵⁷ In February 1951, newly installed as Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), Eisenhower wrote an associate, “[T]here is no defense for Western Europe that depends exclusively or even materially upon the existence, in Europe, of strong American units. The spirit must be here and the strength must be produced here. We cannot be a modern Rome guarding the far frontiers with our legions if for no other reason than that these are *not*, politically, *our* frontiers. What we must do is to assist these people [to] regain their confidence and get on their own military feet.”⁵⁸ For Eisenhower, the stationing of American troops in Europe was “a temporary expedient,” “a stop-gap operation” meant to bridge the gap until the EDC brought a “third force” into being.⁵⁹

The problem for Eisenhower was that the Europeans, the French in particular, had strong incentives to drag their feet on the EDC, correctly suspecting that the intended end-state was an American withdrawal that would leave them alone on the continent with the Soviet Union and a rearmed West Germany. For the French, an American military commitment was more attractive than the EDC, as Sebastian Rosato has argued: “A large American troop presence would protect western Europe from the Soviet Union and also contain the Germans, who could therefore be rearmed to the benefit of the West without threatening France,” all without France having to surrender sovereignty to a supranational institution.⁶⁰ Frustrated by French intransigence, Dulles, an outspoken proponent of the EDC, resorted increasingly to threats to break the logjam. Most famous is the warning he delivered to the North Atlantic Council on December 14, 1953 that if the EDC were to fail, “there would be grave doubt whether continental Europe could be made a place of safety,” which “would compel an agonizing reappraisal of basic United States

policy.”⁶¹ It was widely understood that such a reappraisal would point toward a withdrawal from Europe. More precisely, the implied threat was that the United States would abandon the forward defense of the continent and adopt instead a peripheral strategy that was primarily reliant on air power.⁶² As Dulles explained to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a January 1953 meeting, “If the French and Germans should come to see that the military position would be tolerable for us if we could hold Turkey, Spain, etc., that would create pressures on them which would not exist if they think we are so committed that we must carry the entire load in the area.”⁶³

Given that the Eisenhower administration never followed through on its threats, it is tempting to write off the agonizing reappraisal as a calculated bluff.⁶⁴ After all, the EDC died on August 30, 1954, with the French legislature rejecting the treaty on a procedural vote. Rather than abandon forward defense, the Eisenhower administration assented to an alternative arrangement - pushed by the British - whereby West Germany would join NATO with safeguards. Even factoring in the EDC’s demise, however, the agonizing reappraisal should not be discounted too much. First, as McAllister has argued, Dulles’s remarks may have been calculated, but they were not a bluff. Rather, they “accurately represented his deepest beliefs about the need for Europe to move on toward greater unity as a sheer matter of self-preservation as well as his fears about what would happen in the event the EDC did not come into being.”⁶⁵ Second, the agonizing reappraisal was taken seriously by at least one key audience, the British, prompting them to break with a tradition of non-entanglement and make a long-term commitment to the defense of Europe.⁶⁶ The British commitment, in turn, was a crucial ingredient in the NATO system that ultimately substituted for the EDC. Finally, the agonizing reappraisal demonstrates that the United States was willing to threaten withdrawal from Europe even during the most intense phase of the Cold War, underscoring its freedom to roam.

The Franco-German Revolt

With the benefit of hindsight, it is safe to conclude that Eisenhower overreached in his aspirations for a “third force” and the withdrawal of American troops from Europe.⁶⁷ His successor, Kennedy, was more amenable to a long-term commitment to NATO, as the price that had to be paid for an enduring solution to the double containment problem. In return, Kennedy insisted on centralizing control over alliance policy, especially when it came to nuclear weapons, generating conflict with France. Exploiting the shadow of exit, Kennedy threatened to abandon West Germany when it appeared that it was following France’s lead. These threats were potent enough to put down the Franco-German revolt and lock in the U.S.’s preponderant position in the NATO alliance.

Kennedy’s Approach to Europe

Kennedy, unlike Eisenhower, considered an American military commitment to Europe as inescapable, at least if the double containment problem was to be solved.⁶⁸ A “third force” had not emerged to provide a counterweight to the Soviet Union, and might not be desirable in the first place if it meant a West Germany with too much power and independence. Only the forward presence of American forces on European soil would suffice to check the Soviets while keeping German power limited. In return, Kennedy insisted on centralizing control over alliance policy; especially important was that West Germany not acquire independent control of nuclear weapons.⁶⁹ The flexible response doctrine, for example, is best seen as a strategic rationalization for reasserted American control over NATO nuclear weapons, and thus a repudiation of the nuclear sharing policy that had come to characterize Eisenhower’s approach to the issue.⁷⁰ Kennedy’s basic stance, captured by Green, was that “if the United States was going to defend Europe, it was going to call the military and political shots.”⁷¹ The United States could not,

Kennedy insisted, “accept the notion that we should stay out of all of Europe’s affairs while remaining ready to defend her if war should come.”⁷² The United States would not issue that kind of blank check.

Putting Down the Franco-German Revolt

Kennedy’s warning was directed above all at the French, who were increasingly assertive about voicing their displeasure with the centralizing thrust of American policy. French President Charles De Gaulle, in particular, was attracted to the idea of a “European” Europe, led by France. France, De Gaulle felt, should continue to enjoy the American security guarantee, but otherwise should take the lead in settling political questions like the status of Germany. Kennedy, as we have already seen, rejected this way of thinking, setting up a collision with De Gaulle.⁷³ De Gaulle’s intransigence, in turn, emboldened the West Germans to dig in their heels on the nuclear issue, with West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer ruling out a non-nuclear status for West Germany as part of a Berlin settlement.⁷⁴

Matters between Kennedy, on the one hand, and De Gaulle and Adenauer, on the other, came to a head in early 1963. On January 14, 1963, De Gaulle inaugurated an open revolt against the United States, vetoing Britain’s admission to the European Economic Community (EEC). De Gaulle’s fear was that Britain would act as a Trojan horse for the United States, warning in a press conference that the continental countries would eventually be absorbed into a “colossal Atlantic community dependent on America and under American control” in the event Britain was let in to the EEC.⁷⁵ Even more provocatively, De Gaulle and Adenauer signed a treaty of friendship one week later, raising the specter of a Franco-German bloc independent of American influence.⁷⁶ Kennedy was livid, and prepared to believe the worst about De Gaulle, warning his advisers that “we should look now at the possibility that De Gaulle had concluded

that he would make a deal with the Russians, break up NATO, and push the U.S. out of Europe.”⁷⁷

To preclude this possibility, and put down the Franco-German revolt, Kennedy threatened to abandon West Germany unless Adenauer - or a more pliable West German government - sided with the United States over France. “The Germans,” as Trachtenberg sums up Kennedy’s approach, “had to be told that ‘they can’t have it both ways.’ They had to choose between France and America. If they chose to align themselves with De Gaulle and if they backed the policy of an independent Europe, they could not count on the United States to defend them. If they wanted American protection, they would have to follow the American lead on political and nuclear questions.”⁷⁸ And, indeed, Kennedy warned Adenauer directly in a February 1963 letter, “I would be less than frank if I did not convey to you my grave concern over the mounting suspicion in the American Congress and public that this Nation’s presence and views are no longer welcome in Europe. Those who feel that \$45 billion and 16 years of continuous economic and military assistance have earned us nothing but the hostility of certain European leaders and newspapers are likely to take out their resentment by pressing for a return to restrictive, isolationist concepts that would end Western unity and, according to our best military judgment, seriously weaken the security of Western Europe as well as the United States.”⁷⁹ While Kennedy went on to say that he would do everything in his power to prevent this trend, the meaning was hardly lost on the West Germans, who in early 1963 watered down the Franco-German treaty with a preamble affirming their loyalty to NATO (and thus to the United States).⁸⁰ Kennedy’s threats were successful – where the “agonizing reappraisal” was not – because they were designed not to facilitate an American withdrawal from Europe but an enduring presence on the strongest possible terms.

Conclusion: Less Reassurance Can Be More

Insularity, in sum, accounts for the United States' track record of alliance coercion, as well as the limited damage that has been done to core alliances in the process. Namely, being free to roam, the United States can credibly threaten to leave even geopolitically sensitive regions. At the same time, it remains an attractive security provider for local states when engaged. This has allowed the United States to push for diplomatic and military deals that protect its prerogatives at the expense of allies even while preserving its alliance network. The early Cold War case demonstrates as much. Underscoring its freedom to roam, the United States actively considered leaving Europe throughout the 1950's. Even after resigning itself to staying in the early 1960's, the United States insisted on a preponderant position within the NATO alliance, using threats of abandonment to put down the Franco-German revolt, the most significant challenge to that position.

An important implication follows for policy: American alliance relations have been characterized by more coercion – and less restraint and reassurance - than institutionalists have cared to emphasize, which paradoxically suggests that the United States' alliance network is robust enough to survive Trump's ham-handed attempts at coercion.⁸¹ More generally, we would caution that too much emphasis on reassuring allies risks undercutting insularity's advantages. One frequently hears the claim that allies need to be reassured sufficiently that they are not tempted to build up their power as a hedge against American abandonment.⁸² A felt need to reassure, in turn, has led U.S. policymakers to preoccupy themselves with credibility, to the point of treating reputation as if it were a vital interest.⁸³ The trick, we counter, is to be just reassuring enough that an alliance with the United States remains a desired commodity but not so reassuring that the strategic flexibility that makes insularity valuable is eliminated.⁸⁴ In other

words, policymakers should balance the natural urge to reassure others about the firmness of American commitments with subtle (and sometimes unsubtle) reminders that exit remains an option. To paraphrase Napoleon Bonaparte, a “whiff of abandonment” may sometimes be a good thing in helping the United States manage its allies on favorable terms.

¹ Joshua Shiffrin, “Sound and Fury, Signifying Something? NATO and the Trump Administration’s Second Year,” *H-Diplo/ISSF Policy Series: America and the World – 2017 and Beyond*, July 15, 2018. See also Joshua Shiffrin, “Trump and NATO: Old Wine in Gold Bottles,” *H-Diplo/ISSF Policy Series: America and the World – 2017 and Beyond*, September, 29, 2017.

² G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 271. See also G. John Ikenberry, “Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Winter 1998/99), 43-78.

³ On July 23, 2018, forty-two scholars of international relations published a statement in the *New York Times* condemning Trump’s attacks on international institutions like NATO. For context, see David A. Lake and Peter Gourevitch, “Hundreds of scholars have signed a statement defending the international institutions that Trump has attacked,” *Monkey Cage*, August 14, 2018.

⁴ Patrick Porter and Paul Staniland both make note of this in their wide-ranging critiques of the concept of “liberal order.” See Patrick Porter, “A World Imagined: Nostalgia and Liberal Order,” *Cato Institute Policy Analysis*, Number 843 (June 5, 2018) and Paul Staniland, “Misreading the ‘Liberal Order’: Why We Need New Thinking in American Foreign Policy,” *Lawfare*, July 29, 2018.

⁵ On West Germany, see Gene Gerzhoy, “Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint: How the United States Thwarted West Germany’s Nuclear Ambitions,” *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Spring 2015), 91-129. On the remaining cases, see Francis J. Gavin, “Strategies of Inhibition: U.S. Grand Strategy, the Nuclear Revolution, and Nonproliferation,” *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Summer 2015), 29.

⁶ Michael Beckley, “The Myth of Entangling Alliances: Reassessing the Security Risks of U.S. Defense Pacts,” *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Spring 2015), 7, 22-24.

⁷ On insularity, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2014), 126. There is an important distinction to be made between insularity and the related concept of regional hegemony. Regional hegemons are by definition insular powers, as they are the only great powers in their regions. The United States, for example, is an insular power because it is the only great power in the Western Hemisphere. States can be insular powers but not regional hegemons, however, if they face great power challengers in their near abroad. Britain, for instance, is an insular power but was never a regional hegemon in Europe, even at the height of its power in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, while any form of insularity is inherently advantageous, insularity by virtue of regional hegemony is even more so. This is what makes the United States the insular power *par excellence*.

⁸ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition, 365.

⁹ This is a logical extension of balance-of-threat theory, developed by Stephen Walt. See Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), esp. 23-24 on geographic proximity.

¹⁰ The following is drawn largely from Ikenberry, “Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order.” For related arguments, see Celeste A. Wallander, “Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO After the Cold War,” *International Organization* Vol. 54, No. 4 (Winter 2000), 705-735; David A. Lake, “Beyond Anarchy: The Importance of Security Institutions,” *International Security* Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), 129-160; G. John Ikenberry and Thomas Wright, *Rising Powers and Global Institutions* (Washington, DC: The Century Foundation, 2008); G. John Ikenberry et al., *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Don’t Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment,” *International Security* Vol. 37, No. 3 (Winter 2012), 7-51.

¹¹ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 258.

¹² The term “structural modifier” comes from Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter 2000/01), 136-141.

¹³ Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), 194-196. See also Stephen Van Evera, “Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), 19; Charles L. Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann, “What is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It?” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), 64-66; Keir A. Lieber, *War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 30; and Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 141. Almost all comment on the defensible geography enjoyed by the United States.

¹⁴ On the stopping power of water, see Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition, 114-128.

¹⁵ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition, 41.

¹⁶ The stopping power of water is, in this respect, a concession to defensive realism. See Barry R. Posen, “The Best Defense,” *The National Interest* (Spring 2002), 121 as well as Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 20 and David. W Blagden and Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, “Sea Powers, Continental Powers, and Balancing Theory,” *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Fall 2011), 196.

¹⁷ Randall Schweller notes the asymmetry between fears of abandonment and fears of domination in his review of Ikenberry’s *After Victory*. See Randall L. Schweller, “The Problem of International Order Revisited: A Review Essay,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), 178. See also Geir Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 23, No. 3 (September 1986), 263-277.

¹⁸ In a review of *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Barry Posen contends that insular powers have the same general expansive orientation as continental powers, which follows naturally from the core assumptions of offensive realism. See Posen, “The Best Defense,” 123-124.

¹⁹ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition, 127. See also John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (July/August 2016), 72.

²⁰ Quoted in Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005), 39.

²¹ Robert Art has argued that the United States could have remained secure from invasion even had it failed to intervene in World War II and had Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan gone on to consolidate control over Eurasia. The American public, however, would have suffered a degraded standard of living in an Axis-dominated world, which was reason enough to have entered the war. See Robert Art, “The United States, the Balance of Power, and World War II: Was Spykman Right?” *Security Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (July-September 2005), 365-406 as well as Patrick Porter, “A Matter of Choice: Strategy and Discretion in the Shadow of World War II,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (June 2012), 317-343.

²² Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition, 40-42, 140-143.

²³ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition, 365.

²⁴ Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, 29. See also Christopher Layne, “The ‘Poster Child for Offensive Realism’: America as a Global Hegemon,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Winter 2002/3) 127-128.

²⁵ As Evan Braden Montgomery argues, China is unlikely to engage in “global balancing” until it has been successful at “local balancing.” See Evan Braden Montgomery, “Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China’s Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection,” *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Spring 2014), 124-125.

²⁶ Classical geopolitics, as Zhengyu Wu argues, has long stressed the link between maritime supremacy and the continental balance of power. See Zhengyu Wu, “[Classical geopolitics, realism and the balance of power theory](#),” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 6 (2018), 786-823.

²⁷ See Andrew Preston, “Monsters Everywhere: A Genealogy of National Security,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2014), 480.

²⁸ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition, 142. This is why, as Mearsheimer argues, security competition between the United States and a rising China is nearly inevitable; the United States will not sit idly by while China makes a run at regional hegemony in East Asia. See chapter 10.

²⁹ This is a logical extension of Stephen Walt’s balance-of-threat theory. Walt’s core argument is that states balance against threats rather than power alone, with the level of threat affected by geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions as well as aggregate power. See Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, esp. 23-24 on geographic proximity.

³⁰ On the loss of strength gradient, see Kenneth E. Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York, NY: Harper, 1962), 230-231, 245-247. On the stopping power of water, see Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great*

Power Politics, Updated Edition, 114-128. Also relevant here is Jack Levy and William Thompson's argument that sea powers should elicit less counterbalancing than land powers because sea powers are less territorially threatening. See Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "Balancing on Land and at Sea: Do States Ally against the Leading Global Power?" *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Summer 2010), 7-43. As David Blagden notes, Levy and Thompson potentially understate the importance of geography: Are sea powers less threatening than land powers because of their naval capabilities or because they also happen to be geographically insular in most cases? See Blagden and Levy and Thompson, "Sea Powers, Continental Powers, and Balancing Theory," 190-192.

³¹ Walt, *Taming American Power*, 39. For similar formulations, see Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 277 and Stephen M. Walt, "Keeping the World 'Off-Balance': Self-Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy," in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 137.

³² As Glenn Snyder argues, a state's bargaining power with allies will be greater the lower its dependence on the alliance and the looser its commitment to it. Insularity ensures that the United States will generally be less dependent on an alliance for its security than its partners and that, correspondingly, its commitment will be looser. See Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 165-180. Notably, this may help account for evidence that the United States has been relatively successful in avoiding entanglement. See Beckley, "The Myth of Entangling Alliances" and TongFi Kim, "Why Alliances Entangle But Seldom Entrap States," *Security Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (July-September 2011), 350-377.

³³ In other words, the prospect of significant change in existing political and security relationships primes actors to think in terms of power and security tradeoffs even if such concerns are not ordinarily at the fore of their foreign policy agendas. Making a similar point is Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants How Great Powers Respond to Power Shifts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), chap. 1.

³⁴ Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint."

³⁵ As a September 1976 U.S. demarche to Taiwan put it, "Should the ROC or any other government seek national reprocessing facilities [i.e., to produce fissile material for a nuclear weapon], this would risk jeopardizing additional highly important relationships with the U.S." See SecState WashDC to AmEmbassy Taipei, September 4, 1976, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb221/T-6a.pdf>. On the Taiwan case, see Alexandre Debs and Nuno P. Monteiro, *Nuclear Politics: The Strategic Causes of Proliferation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 297-326. On the South Korea case, see Lyong Choi, "The first nuclear crisis in the Korean Peninsula, 1975-76," *Cold War History*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2014), 71-90.

³⁶ Quoted in Richard J. Moon, *The Year of Europe, 1973-74: A Study in Alliance Diplomacy* (PhD Thesis, London School of Economics, 1994), 249.

³⁷ Moon, *The Year of Europe*, 250.

³⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, "Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany," February 24, 1990, online via <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/memcons-telcons>. For background on the U.S. and West German positions at the time, see Brent Scowcroft, "Meetings with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl," February 24-25, 1990, folder "German Reunification [1]," Hutchings Files, George Bush Presidential Library, College Station, TX (hereafter GBPL).

³⁹ Memorandum of Conversation (Laird and Brosio), February 14, 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-76, Volume XLI: NATO, 1969-1972* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2012), 32-33. For background, see Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon, February 20, 1969, *FRUS1969-76: XLI*, 37-43. For subsequent discussions on U.S. withdrawals, see, e.g., Telegram from the Embassy in Germany to the Department of State, June 12, 1970, *FRUS1969-76: XLI*, 157-58; Minutes of a National Security Council Review Group Meeting, June 16, 1970, *FRUS1969-76: XLI*, 159-68; Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, October 14, 1970, *FRUS1969-76: XLI*, 195-97.

⁴⁰ Memorandum from C. Fred Bergsten of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, July 9, 1969, *FRUS1969-76: XLI*, 68-69; Memorandum from Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon, December 5, 1970, *FRUS1969-76: XLI*, 240-41. For a different interpretation of U.S.-European negotiations in this period, however, see Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-71* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 190-91.

⁴¹ Yukinori Komine, "Whither a 'Resurgent Japan': The Nixon Doctrine and the Japanese Defense Buildup, 1969-1976," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 2014), 88-128. As Komine also notes, the threat of American withdrawal from East Asia – which was pervasive throughout the early-mid 1970s – had to be coupled with signals that the United States would stay engaged if Japan increased its contributions to East Asian security.

⁴² Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 265.

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- ⁴³ Making a compelling case that U.S. policy toward Europe shifted from buck-passing under Eisenhower to balancing under Kennedy is Brendan Rittenhouse Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty: U.S. Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition,” *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Fall 2012), 9-43.
- ⁴⁴ Ikenberry, “Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order,” 63-65 and Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 200-203.
- ⁴⁵ Ikenberry, “Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order,” 71 and Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 165-166; 191-199; and 205-210.
- ⁴⁶ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 265.
- ⁴⁷ Quoted in North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO Leaders: Lord Ismay,” undated, https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/declassified_137930.htm (accessed February 2018).
- ⁴⁸ Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- ⁴⁹ James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943-1954* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 16.
- ⁵⁰ Mark S. Sheetz, “Exit strategies: American grand designs for postwar European security,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer 1999), 27.
- ⁵¹ Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 167.
- ⁵² McAllister, *No Exit*, 16, 20. See also Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, 164 and Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 114.
- ⁵³ Sheetz, “Exit strategies,” 25.
- ⁵⁴ Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 119. Trachtenberg, McAllister, and Sheetz push back against those like Melvyn Leffler and Geir Lundestad who argue that the United States did not want to see an independent “third force” emerge in Europe. See Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 17 and Geir Lundestad, “Empire” *By Integration: The United States and European Integration, 1945-1997* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.
- ⁵⁵ Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 23-24. On Eisenhower’s approach to the Cold War in Europe, see also Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 147-156 and McAllister, *No Exit*, 210-215.
- ⁵⁶ On the power politics surrounding the EDC, see Sebastian Rosato, *Europe United: Power Politics and the Making of the European Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), chap. 4.
- ⁵⁷ Eisenhower feared that the costs of a long-term commitment would threaten American liberties, turning the United States into a garrison state. See Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” esp. 27.
- ⁵⁸ Quoted in Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 147. Emphasis in original.
- ⁵⁹ Memorandum by the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Cutler) to the Secretary of State, September 3, 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1952-1954, Volume II, Part I, [Document 87](#). Quoted in McAllister, *No Exit*, 231.
- ⁶⁰ Rosato, *Europe United*, 142-143.
- ⁶¹ Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Volume V, Part 1, [Document 462](#). See also “[Remarks Made by Secretary Dulles in Paris](#),” *The New York Times*, December 15, 1953. As Brian Duchin argues, Dulles’s December threat was far from new. See Brian R. Duchin, “The ‘Agonizing Reappraisal’: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the European Defense Community,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (April 1992), 202.
- ⁶² On forward defense versus the peripheral strategy, see Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, 153-160.
- ⁶³ Memorandum of Discussion of State-Mutual Security Agency-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, January 28, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-54, Volume 5, Part I, [Document 374](#). Quoted in McAllister, *No Exit*, 226. At the same time, Dulles recognized that loose talk of redeploying American troops could jeopardize ratification of the EDC. He thus worked, unsuccessfully, to keep a tight lid on Pentagon proposals along these lines. See McAllister, *No Exit*, 230-235 as well as Sheetz, “Exit Strategies,” 34.
- ⁶⁴ See Duchin, “The ‘Agonizing Reappraisal,’” 212 as well as Kevin Ruane, “Agonizing Reappraisals: Anthony Eden, John Foster Dulles and the Crisis of European Defense, 1953-54,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (December 2002), 178.
- ⁶⁵ McAllister, *No Exit*, 237-238.
- ⁶⁶ Ruane, “Agonizing Reappraisals,” 152-154, 160, 172-174.
- ⁶⁷ See McAllister, *No Exit*, 243-244 and Sheetz, “Exit strategies,” 40. For a more bullish assessment of Eisenhower’s buck-passing approach, see Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 41.
- ⁶⁸ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, p. 284. For a succinct overview of Kennedy’s approach to Europe, see Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 31-37. Francis Gavin introduces the important caveat that, however open he was to a long-term commitment to Europe, Kennedy was not convinced that large American conventional forces were needed for its defense, with the exception of the anomalous situation in Berlin. In fact, Kennedy seriously considered plans

to withdraw U.S. troops from Europe. See Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, 60, 104-106 and Francis J. Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 44-46.

⁶⁹ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 302-315.

⁷⁰ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 315-320. Gavin is convincing that flexible response, more rhetorical than real, was targeted at the German problem. See Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, chapter 2, esp. 31, 54-55.

⁷¹ Green, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 37.

⁷² Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in France, May 18, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume 13, [Document 251](#).

⁷³ On the escalating disagreement between Kennedy and De Gaulle over how much independence France (and thus Europe) should enjoy within the NATO alliance, see Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 331-339 as well as Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance Since World War II* (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 126-131 and Frederic Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance*, Translated by Susan Emanuel (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), chapter 3.

⁷⁴ See Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 339-342 as well as Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 112-114.

⁷⁵ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 369.

⁷⁶ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 371. On the Franco-German revolt, see also Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, chap. 4.

⁷⁷ Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting No. 38 (Part II), January 25, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XIII, [Document 169](#).

⁷⁸ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 374.

⁷⁹ Letter from President Kennedy to Chancellor Adenauer, February 1, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XIII, [Document 65](#).

⁸⁰ Not long after, Adenauer was ousted in favor of the Atlantic-minded Ludwig Erhard. On Germany's about-face on the Franco-German treaty and Adenauer's demise, see Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 377-379; Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe*, 104-107; and Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 115-116.

⁸¹ See, especially, Porter, "A World Imagined." On NATO's prospects for weathering the Trump era, see Shiffrinson, "Sound and Fury, Signifying Something?" 11-15.

⁸² On the role of assurance in U.S. grand strategy, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 91-92.

⁸³ Robert J. McMahon, "Credibility and World Power: Exploring the Psychological Dimension in Postwar American Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Fall 1991), 455-471. To a surprising degree, the evidence cuts against the notion that commitments are interdependent, and thus that reputation deserves the importance that policymakers have ascribed to it. See, for example, Ted Hopf, *Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965-1990* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1994); Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); and Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005). For a contrary view, see Alex Weisiger and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (March 2015), 473-495.

⁸⁴ This is another way of saying that the alliance security dilemma – the tension between the fear of abandonment and the fear of entrapment – needs to be carefully managed. On the alliance security dilemma, see Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 180-192.