Arms Control as Wedge Strategy

How Arms Limitation Deals Divide Alliances

Strategic arms control is in crisis.¹ The United States and Russia have retreated from agreements that formed the framework for post–Cold War arms cuts and strategic stability. In 2002, the United States withdrew from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. In 2007, Russia suspended the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) and formally renounced it in 2015. The U.S. Department of Defense’s 2018 Nuclear Posture Review depicted an increasingly “uncertain security environment,” characterized by new nuclear arms races, proliferation, and great power competition, which made it imperative that the United States drop arms control agreements that were not beneficial to its security, verifiable, and enforceable.² The United States withdrew from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019 and from the Open Skies Treaty in 2020. The only strategic arms control agreement between the United States and Russia (i.e., the 2011 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty [New START]) expires in 2026. The time for building a successor framework for strategic arms control is running out. Whether a political basis for one can be found is now a pressing matter of international security.

Two trends are driving today’s arms control crisis. First, nuclear stability is weakened by new technology: improving missile accuracy, remote sensing, antisubmarine capabilities, and a precision revolution in conventional weapon...
ons. Such changes, uncertainty about how they will be used, and competitive pressures to counter them have obsolesced the existing framework of arms control. Second, the political forcefield that sustained the old framework has been altered by China’s rise and the deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations. Russia and China now contest U.S. primacy with military modernization, challenges to U.S. alliances, and opposing world order visions. Can strategic arms control be revitalized amidst great power competition and nuclear disorder? Can the United States still use it to improve its security?

To answer these questions, we examine the fault lines in arms control thought that reflect debates about why states prioritize arms control and how power politics fit in. Here, we develop a theory of arms control wedge strategies. Wedge strategies use “diplomacy and statecraft to move or keep a potential adversary out of an opposing alliance”; they seek to “prevent, break up, or weaken [an opposing] alliance at an acceptable cost.” Along with other motives for arms control (e.g., to preserve stability, reduce costs, or secure military advantages), states may use it in a wedge strategy to weaken alignment between adversaries. When states do so successfully, arms control does not just reflect power relations, it alters them. Our theory explains how arms control can drive wedges by affecting adversaries’ threat perceptions, their beliefs about the costs and benefits of formal commitments, and their degree of trust in each other. Because these factors can weaken adversaries’ alignments, the motive to drive a wedge may not only shape how states conduct arms control diplomacy but also influence the terms that they put in the final deal. We apply our theory to three landmark strategic arms control negotiations: the Five-

Power Treaty and the Four-Power Treaty at the 1921–22 Washington Naval Conference, the 1963 Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (LTBT), and the 1972 Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I). We show how the wedge motive informed these negotiations and influenced great power relations.8

Our research has two significant policy implications. First, despite recent setbacks, strategic arms control can continue to play a critical role in U.S. security policy. Though great power competition strains the old frameworks, the United States can use strategic arms control—especially the platform of New START renewal—to create an advantage in the strategic triangle with Russia and China. Second, the United States may also be challenged by other states’ use of arms control to divide opponents. In particular, North Korea’s missile and nuclear developments could prompt a deal to cap its arsenal before it perfects capabilities to attack the U.S. mainland. However, North Korea might demand concessions that would weaken the U.S.-South Korea alliance.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we review the main lines of arms control thought. We show how our theory augments conventional accounts of the motives and effects of arms control. Second, we detail three mechanisms of division through which states use arms control to drive wedges. Third, we examine three major cases of arms control wedge strategies, using process-tracing to reveal the processes of division at work in each case.9 Finally, we conclude by explaining why those processes are relevant to current U.S. nuclear arms control policies.


Existing Theories of Strategic Arms Control

Modern arms control centers on formal, treaty-based measures to limit the numbers, types, uses, and destructiveness of weapons. Many such measures are general, broad, regime-like schemes. Others are more “rivalry specific,” focused on two or a handful of powers (or alliances), crafted to address military aspects of their competition. The latter kind we call “strategic arms control.” Within its scope are many important pre-nuclear and nuclear agreements from the interwar period (e.g., 1921 Four-Power Treaty), the early 1970s (e.g., SALT I and ABM Treaty), and the post–Cold War era (e.g., CFE Treaty, 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty [START], and New START). The first scope condition for our theory is strategic arms control, which concerns high-stakes military forces that have great implications for the balance of power.

The second scope condition for our theory is the strategic triangle, wherein the motive to prevent, weaken, or break up a threatening alliance may play an important role in driving arms control negotiations and outcomes. Thus, our theory hinges on a fundamental characteristic of strategic arms control in a strategic triangle—it is struck between rivals. That idea of cooperation between rivals has, since the 1950s, fueled progress and debates in arms control thought. To elucidate our theory, we first give an overview of those developments.

The Standard Model of Strategic Arms Control

We begin with the model rooted in the pioneering work of Thomas Schelling, Donald Brennan, and Hedley Bull. The fundamental premise of the standard model is that adversaries can have “important interests of military policy in common” and design measures to “realize the cooperation which their inter-

ests actually entail.”14 The counterintuitive point is that states can achieve three common objectives (i.e., increased stability, limited war, and reduced expenses) as direct effects of arms control measures15 through “military collaboration with potential enemies.”16

The first direct effect is increased stability, or a reduced likelihood of war. Proponents of the standard model see arms control as promoting three levels of stability. Arms control can promote “strategic stability” by helping states “construct a military balance that in itself dissuades [them] from thinking that they can use force effectively” against each other.17 It can promote “arms race stability” by “tranquilizing” the action-reaction dynamic of competitive buildups.18 And it can promote “crisis stability” through schemes that “create ‘transparency’ and rules of the road that will reduce chances of accidental escalation in a crisis confrontation.”19 More broadly, arms control talks and agreements may foster stability by reducing states’ uncertainties about “current and likely future forces, practices, and intentions.”20

The second direct effect of arms control is to limit a war’s scope and violence. States may forge agreements to constrain, eliminate, or reduce the collateral damage from more destructive weapons, or to help end wars quickly.21 Saving money is the third direct effect, which states can accomplish by avoiding an arms race that, absent an agreement, would otherwise occur.22 What all three objectives have in common is to find positive sum measures from which both sides can directly gain. Verification and transparency measures, such as on-site inspections and notification rules, can further cooperation. At a minimum, methods for disclosing information make it easier for rivals to cooperate

18. Schelling and Halperin, Strategy and Arms Control, p. 169; and Bull, Control of the Arms Race, pp. 4–12.
despite persistent distrust. But such policies also may “play a broader and more dynamic role than detecting violations” by signaling reciprocal reassurances and constituting concrete channels for stabilizing behavior.\(^{23}\)

**THE SKEPTIC’S MODEL OF STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL**

During the heyday of superpower arms control between the 1960s and 1980s, hawks not only opposed cooperating with the Soviets but also derided the standard model’s elision of the more competitive (i.e., zero-sum) and political motives of strategic arms control.\(^{24}\) Rivals, skeptics argue, use strategic arms control to obtain or preserve relative military and political advantages over one another.\(^{25}\) They use it to make opponents complacent and vulnerable, and then to “negotiate from strength” for further gains.\(^{26}\) All this makes substantial strategic arms control hard to achieve and sustain.\(^{27}\) For skeptics, verification is as much a problem as it is a solution for cooperation given underlying antagonism and distrust. Rivals use transparency measures to pursue or protect competitive advantages. They exploit verification schemes to obtain sensitive information about their enemy’s arsenal and promote deception about their own.\(^{28}\) When arms control is needed, such as between serious rivals, it is often unobtainable because transparency measures to monitor compliance could ex-


\(^{27}\) The paradox is that arms control is either “impossible” (between serious rivals) or “irrelevant” (between friendly states): Gray, *House of Cards*, pp. 16–19.

pose the parties to increased security risks. When arms control negotiations and deals do occur, skeptics expect power politics, rather than more fine-grained technical issues, to drive negotiations.

Both models emphasize that direct effect motives—whether cooperative or competitive—shape the arms control “game” itself. This affinity between the two models becomes overt in synthetic accounts of strategic arms control that depict rivals simultaneously seeking to harness both cooperative and competitive direct effects. Our theory extends the idea of arms control as a way to achieve competitive advantage, but it shifts the focus from two states and direct effects to three states and indirect effects.

**Applying Wedge Strategy Theory to Arms Control**

Scholars from both the standard and the skeptical perspectives recognize that strategic arms control can create indirect effects in other areas of the states’ relationships that are “outside” the military game. Some have shown how states use negotiations to simultaneously link nonmilitary issues and arms control goals to overcome deadlocks by shifting the game from zero-sum to positive sum. Others have explained how states use arms control to send diplomatic signals, facilitate broader political cooperation, and reinforce their systemic privileges. In our theory, the intent to reap such indirect effects can be a potent driver of negotiations and deals.

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29. Coe and Vaynman, “Why Arms Control Is So Rare.”
Policymakers may employ a form of statecraft to obtain an indirect effect, and arms control, like any other security policy, also can be used in this way. Thus, although states’ concerns about stability and arms racing may provide some of the impetus for arms control talks, leaders may only conclude important agreements because the negotiating process enables them to pursue and obtain highly valued nonmilitary payoffs. It is common to find not only that multiple motives lie behind important decisions but also that the desire to achieve indirect effects weighs heavily in those choices. Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s dramatic decision in July 1940 to attack the French fleet in Oran, Algeria, for example, was meant not only to ensure that the Germans did not capture the ships but also to “make a profound impression in every country” (the United States especially) of Britain’s determination to fight on. In short, a policy’s indirect effects may be as significant as the direct ones in the overall calculus.

Cold War analysts highlighted an indirect effect of arms control that is especially pertinent to this point. They warned that U.S.-Soviet arms control could precipitate fissures in the Western alliance because weaker North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies would fear both U.S.-Soviet collusion and the erosion of the U.S. commitment to European defense. Hawks surmised that Soviet arms control diplomacy thus had an additional grand strategic motive—to “exacerbate dissension within the Western alliance.” Their arguments were not based in a general concept or theory of arms control wedge strategies. Here, our theory intervenes.
Our theory starts with a basic means-end calculus—A’s direct policy toward B is meant to have an indirect effect on C.\footnote{Jervis, \textit{System Effects}, pp. 31–32.} It posits that A may pursue strategic arms control with B in part to advance a wedge strategy that isolates C by weakening alignment between B and C. What we mean by “weaken alignment” is captured in Glenn H. Snyder’s “expectations” concept, which defines alignments as “patterns of expectations and intentions [among states] regarding future support or opposition” in “disputes or wars with…other states.”\footnote{Glenn H. Snyder, “Process Variables in Neorealist Theory,” \textit{Security Studies}, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1996), p. 174, doi.org/10.1080/09636419608429279; and Glenn H. Snyder, “Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut,” \textit{Journal of International Affairs}, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 1990), p. 105, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24357226.} Thus, a wedge strategy weakens alignment between B and C when it lowers expectations that they will support each other in future conflict.

The wedge strategy motive does not always inform arms control decisions and outcomes. Our theory posits that it sometimes does in significant ways. Different states approach arms control with their own motives and goals. Even if a state seeks a deal to drive a wedge, the deal will not happen if the other(s) don’t want it for their own reasons. And even if the wedge effect looms large as a benefit to that state, it is just a part of the overall bargained outcome concerning that state’s security.\footnote{Brennan, “Setting and Goals,” pp. 34–37.} For the wedge motive to be significant in a case, then, at least one party pushing the process (A) must seek to promote a wedge effect. That indirect motive need not be A’s only or most important goal in the process, but it must be important enough to lead A’s decision-makers to favor the process and deal.\footnote{Downs, Rocke, and Siverson, “Arms Races and Cooperation,” pp. 130–132.}

Understanding strategic arms control’s potential to divide opponents improves our grasp of wedge strategy in power politics.\footnote{On investigating wedge mechanisms, see Stacie E. Goddard and Daniel H. Nexon, “The Dynamics of Global Power Politics: A Framework for Analysis,” \textit{Journal of Global Security Studies}, Vol. 1, No. 1 (February 2016), pp. 13–15, doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogv007.} In general, wedge strategies arise in any triangular competition in which one state’s strength or survival is endangered by the collusion of two others. In such circumstances, “states seek to reduce the menace to themselves by sowing discord among potential adversaries” because they “gain security as well as bargaining power when [their] main adversaries are themselves divided.”\footnote{Jervis, \textit{System Effects}, pp. 177–179, 282.} Although wedge strategies can be either accommodative or coercive, this article focuses on the first category. When facing two potential adversaries simultaneously, it is often better to accommodate one instead of confronting both.\footnote{Crawford, “Preventing Enemy Coalitions,” pp. 160–162; Yasuhiro Izumikawa, “To Coerce or Reward? Theorizing Wedge Strategies in Alliance Politics,” \textit{Security Studies}, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2013), pp. 365–379.} And arms control is
a way to accommodate rather than coerce. Selective accommodation “singles out” a target state for “preferential treatment” to keep or lure it away from alignment with a more dangerous one.\textsuperscript{49} Thus, in any selective accommodation scenario, there are at least three actors: the divider (A), and two others (B and C) that are (or are becoming) aligned against A. One of them (B) is the target of accommodation; the other (C) is the adversary to be isolated. Strategic arms control—as the standard model implies—can be an important channel for such accommodation, insofar as B values the military and political benefits that a deal with A may provide.

In general, an accommodative wedge strategy can generate division in three ways.\textsuperscript{50} The first way involves a specific, contingent exchange: A offers benefits to B if B will, in return, isolate C. The second way exacerbates conflicts: A’s accommodative bid creates or elevates issues in dispute between B and C. The third way involves reassurance: A accommodates B to dilute common threat perceptions that cause B and C to align against A.\textsuperscript{51} These three ways of dividing are not, in general, mutually exclusive, but when they are distilled into specific mechanisms of arms control wedge strategy, we expect each mechanism to dominate in a strategic context that is unconducive to the other two.

Next, we show how these three ways of dividing adversaries translate into more specific mechanisms of arms control wedge strategy. We show how A can use arms control to weaken B–C alignment through a contingent exchange (specific linkage), or by exacerbating conflict between B and C (catalyze conflict), or by changing B’s threat perception (peace offensive). Table 1 depicts these arms control wedge strategy mechanisms and highlights the conceptual ties between these mechanisms and more general theoretical images of cohesion. Each image captures a distinct reason why alliances—or, less formally, alignments—form or deform, and therefore implies a different wedge mechanism. Thus, the three wedge mechanisms differ in their internal logics and in the kinds of strategic situations in which they tend to occur.
SPECIFIC LINKAGE MECHANISM
This first mechanism through which arms control can generate division entails a direct exchange: A offers relatively attractive rewards to B (i.e., arms limitation) contingent upon B’s compliance with A’s demand that B alters its alignment with C (see table 1). This mechanism stems from a “bidding war” image of cohesion, which depicts alignments as products of delicate calculations of costs and benefits that are sensitive to competitive bids. Here, “a small shift in . . . cost-benefit ratios can turn neutrals into allies, allies into neutrals, and allies into enemies,” and a credible, well-timed “side-payment may determine with which of two potential . . . coalitions a state may line up.”52 Absent such bids, the image suggests that alignments will maintain the status quo. But in the context of tight alignment competition, states’ positions reflect attempts to obtain the best payoff from at least two alignment options. A more competitive offer can sway a state’s allegiance. Specific linkage has three key indicators. First, B and C are on a path to extend the status quo of their partnership. Second, A’s agreement to limit its arms or military posture relative to B is—or is central to—the benefit to B’s interest in arms reduction on which the deal pivots. Also, the exchange is explicit: A’s demand that B reciprocate by formally altering its alignment with C is embedded in the negotiations leading to the arms control agreement. Third, B’s leaders comply with A’s demand to secure the arms limit benefits embodied in the deal.

Table 1. Arms Control Wedge Strategy Mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanisms</th>
<th>Cohesion Images</th>
<th>Alignment Trajectories</th>
<th>Processes of Division</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>specific linkage</td>
<td>bidding war</td>
<td>B and C extending status quo</td>
<td>A’s bid alters B’s alignment with C via direct exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catalyze conflict</td>
<td>team of rivals</td>
<td>B and C diverging</td>
<td>A’s bid elevates conflicting interest between B and C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peace offensive</td>
<td>balance of threat</td>
<td>B and C converging</td>
<td>A’s bid promotes discrepant threat perceptions between B and C</td>
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CATALYZE CONFLICT MECHANISM
In this second mechanism, A negotiates an arms control agreement with B to exacerbate tensions between B and C (see table 1). This mechanism stems from an image of cohesion that depicts allies as “intimate enemies,” “warring friends,” or a team of rivals. Here, even as they organize against others, partners try to shirk and shift burdens of cooperation, and they try to control, restrain, and compete against one another. In such alliances, we find both compelling reasons to cooperate and combustible conflicting interests. Recognizing the latter, a divider may, as Robert Jervis notes, manipulate issues that “create conflict among those who might otherwise come together.” A may press for an arrangement to a dispute that undermines a prior bargain between B and C by advantaging one more than the other; or, A may endorse a position that is preferred by B but opposed by C. The catalyze conflict arms control mechanism thus implies three observable indicators. First, with frictions already straining alignment between B and C, A pursues arms control with B, intending to worsen the divergence. Second, A tries to fashion the deal with B in ways that will achieve this divergence. A may, for example, advance an arms control deal with B that “takes its side” in a dispute with C, prompting C’s backlash against a deal “made at [its] expense.” Even if the terms of the A–B deal do not directly impinge C’s military priorities, the terms may reduce A’s military pressure on B such that B is freer to focus on its conflicts with C. Either way, C will perceive B’s cooperation with A as betrayal. Third, the conduct of the A–B arms control process and/or sealing of a deal does, in fact, accelerate growing antagonism between B and C.

PEACE OFFENSIVE MECHANISM
The premise of this third mechanism is that the accommodative function of arms control can help lower the parties’ threat perceptions. Its causal logic springs from the well-known “balance of threat” image of cohesion. Keeping to the strategic triangle, the cause of alignment between B and C is the danger that A poses to them both. This implies the pathway to dis-unity—discrepancy

54. Jervis, System Effects, p. 190, also p. 189, n. 44.
between B’s and C’s perceptions of the threat posed by A. Thus, with a “peace offensive,” A uses conciliatory diplomacy to alleviate B’s insecurity in a way that weakens B’s alignment with C. Likewise, with an arms control peace offensive, A can use its agreement to limit arms with B to diminish B’s perception of the danger that A poses (see table 1). This creates (or reinforces) a gap between B’s perception of A’s threat and C’s perception of A’s threat. For the peace offensive mechanism, process-tracing should reveal three indicators. First, B and C are converging against A because of a shared perception of A’s threat. Second, that convergence endangers A’s security or interests. Third, A recognizes or anticipates this process and defuses it by pursuing a strategic arms control agreement that is beneficial to B’s security.

Case Study Method and Research Design

We address three key matters in each of our three case studies. First, we show that wedge motive was an important ex ante objective of the arms control negotiation for decision-makers on one side of the arms control process. A’s leaders sought through strategic arms control with B to weaken alignment between B and C. Second, we demonstrate that A’s leaders implement the strategy following one of the three mechanisms described in table 1. Third, we describe the wedge effect, showing that the strategic arms control deal weakened expectations of mutual support between B and C, via the process specified by the primary mechanism in each case.

Owing to the nature of both the theory itself and the theory-development enterprise, process-tracing is essential in our case studies. States may pursue strategic arms control for several reasons simultaneously. In such circumstances of equifinality (i.e., when multiple motives or mechanisms lead to the same outcome), process-tracing allows us to differentiate leaders’ motives (e.g., to drive wedges or secure certain political outcomes), to show how those motives influence leaders’ approaches to the strategic arms control process, and to observe a wedge effect (i.e., weakened alignment expectations). Finally, process-tracing is essential to developing a typological theory that delineates different arms control wedge strategy configurations.

The three landmark cases of twentieth-century strategic arms control in this

article span pre-nuclear and nuclear eras and include the full range of B–C alignment trajectories: extending the status quo, diverging, or converging (see table 1). Thus, each logic of division is demonstrated through causal process observations in a corresponding case.

Washington Naval Conference and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance

In December 1921, the United States convened the Washington Naval Conference, where it led negotiations that produced the Five-Power Washington Naval Treaty in which Britain, Japan, and the United States (along with France and Italy as signatories) agreed to stop battleship building for ten years and to maintain (among the first three powers) the 5:5:3 ratio that then characterized the balance of capital ship strength among them. Most accounts of the origins of the naval treaty emphasize direct effect motivations (e.g., avoid an arms race, save money, and preserve stability) for the major participants.\(^6\) A combination of conducive conditions made it possible to complete the agreement. First, a highly motivated broker with strong leverage led the negotiations. Second, all parties expected that unilateral verification of compliance with the main terms would be easy and unthreatening.\(^6\)in The Warren G. Harding administration, avoiding a costly naval arms race and the associated instability were major goals. The administration faced domestic demands to cut defense spending and to increase international peace efforts.\(^6\) Some scholars suggest that the Washington Naval Conference prevented a naval arms race and built a framework of great power cooperation that fostered stability in East Asia.\(^6\) In contrast, we argue that the Harding administration had a wedge motive, which was one key reason why it promoted and embraced the Five-Power Treaty.

This case shows the United States pursuing a wedge goal through the specific linkage mechanism. While the Five-Power Treaty was a necessary focal point of the Washington Naval Conference, the deal hinged on broader agreements on the management of great power relations.\(^6\) The United States did want the direct benefits of arms limits. It also wanted to dismantle the Anglo-

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Japanese Alliance (formed in 1902), which was up for renewal in 1921. This wedge motive was one of the key “political considerations” that, “far more than economic necessity or the demands of strategy and weapons technology,” drove U.S. diplomacy at the Washington Naval Conference. In late May 1921, the British government, responding to hints from the U.S. Secretary of State, Charles E. Hughes, encouraged the United States to propose an effort to arrange a tripartite common Pacific policy. Britain hoped that under those auspices they might draw the United States into a refashioned Anglo-Japanese-U.S. alliance. Instead, the United States convened a conference that joined Pacific policy and naval arms control and exploited the linkage between them to abolish the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

MOTIVE

Although the United States and Japan fought on the same side in World War I, its end left them with serious conflicts. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance seemed to blame. Because of this alliance, Japan gained from the war control over Germany’s Pacific islands north of the equator. Its alliance with Britain had also buffered U.S. opposition to Japan’s coercive diplomacy against China in the 1915 “Twenty-One Demands” crisis. From the United States’ perspective, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance emboldened Japan’s adventurism in the Far East and its designs for U.S. positions in the Philippines, Guam, and Hawaii.

In the months before the Washington Naval Conference, U.S. officials thus “strove with growing intensity of purpose to drive a wedge into the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.”

The United States was unambiguous about its opposition to renewal

72. Sprout and Sprout, Toward a New Order, pp. 92–93; Klein, “Whitehall,” pp. 462, 468–469; and
of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. As Aukland Geddes, the British Ambassador to the United States, warned British Foreign Secretary Alfred Curzon on June 6, Hughes thought that renewal would be “disastrous.”73 Later that month, Hughes elaborated this point in a conversation with Geddes. The United States “had very clear policies in the Far East.” It had embraced “the ‘Open Door’ policy and the integrity of China, and now . . . the integrity of Russia.” Consequently, “if Great Britain and Japan had any arrangement by which Great Britain was to support the special interests of Japan, the latter might be likely . . . to take positions which” challenged U.S. interests. Such a situation, Hughes warned, “would be fraught with mischief.” It would be far better “for the United States to find complete support [from] Great Britain.” This attitude was not “antagonistic to Japan,” Hughes averred, because it “would be in her interests as in the interests of the peace of the world.”74 In the context of this exposition, Hughes suggested that a three-way understanding of common Pacific policies would be better than a renewed Anglo-Japanese Alliance.75

In early July, signals of U.S. opposition intensified. Hughes’ conversations with Geddes made it clear that “the mere fact of renewal, in whatever form, would create a very unfavorable impression” with the U.S. public and government.76 Under instructions from Harding and Hughes, the U.S. ambassador to Britain, George Harvey, confirmed to Curzon that “without fail [the] United States government would view with regret the renewal or establishment of any special relation of cooperation or partnership between the British Empire and Japan.” In this context of strident warnings, Geddes advised Curzon that “opinion on the subject of naval disarmament has tended to crystallize round the termination of Anglo-Japanese Alliance.” Furthermore, Geddes observed that a certain idea of how to end the alliance was forming in Washington—to replace the alliance with a “tripartite declaration of common policy in the

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73. Sir A. Geddes (Washington) to Earl Curzon, June 6, 1921, DBFP, pp. 300–301.

74. Memorandum of a Conversation between the Secretary of State and the British Ambassador (Geddes), June 23, 1921, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1921, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office [GPO], 1936), pp. 314–315. Geddes’s reports to Curzon about this conversation were incisive. There could be “no doubt” that the United States regarded “even the thought of renewal of [the Anglo-Japanese] treaty as evidence” of unfriendly British intentions. Hughes “undoubtedly believe[d] that existence of an Anglo-Japanese alliance makes Japan less tractable and therefore tends to make an American-Japanese war less easy to avoid.” Sir A. Geddes (Washington) to Earl Curzon, June 24, 1921, DBFP, pp. 310–311; and Sir A. Geddes (Washington) to Earl Curzon, June 24, 1921, DBFP, p. 312.

75. Memorandum of a Conversation between the Secretary of State and the British Ambassador (Geddes), June 23, 1921, FRUS, 1921, Vol. 2, p. 315.

76. Sir A. Geddes (Washington) to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, July 2, 1921, DBFP, p. 320; and Sir A. Geddes (Washington) to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, July 6, 1921, DBFP, p. 326.
Pacific” to which a deal on “limitation of armaments in [the] Pacific might be added.”

**SPECIFIC LINKAGE MECHANISM**

Indeed, the United States intended to directly link the arms control and the tri-partite common Pacific policy projects. Hughes informed Curzon that conferences for both projects “ought to be held in Washington [and] that both were indispensable parts of the same whole (emphasis added).” The Harding administration’s position regarding naval disarmament, which was the focus of the Washington Naval Conference negotiations, afforded the United States “extraordinary bargaining power” to advance other political objectives. As Harold and Margaret Sprout explain, this leverage derived “mainly from [its] possession of sixteen ‘post-Jutland’ capital ships, built and building. . . . Completion of the ships on schedule would give the United States by far the strongest battle line in the world for a considerable number of years at least. . . . With the United States thus setting the pace of naval construction . . . any proposal put forward by the American delegation at the [Naval] conference was bound to receive serious consideration.”

Britain wanted a way out of the looming naval arms race, and so did Japan. “Our most urgent object,” said Churchill in June 1921, “was to avoid a naval rivalry between Great Britain and the United States.” To keep pace with the U.S. buildup (which Britain felt it must do absent an agreement) “would require a financial outlay which Great Britain’s war-weakened and seriously depressed economy was then in no condition to bear.” Britain was struggling to recover economically from World War I, and it would soon need

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77. Sir A. Geddes (Washington) to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, July 7, 1921, DBFP, p. 328.
78. Marquess Curzon of Kedleston to Sir A. Geddes (Washington), July 14, 1921, DBFP, p. 342.
82. Sprout and Sprout, *Toward a New Order*, p. 123. In May 1921, Churchill warned the cabinet that a naval arms race with the United States “would pit America against Japan, draw in the British because of their intention to maintain a one-power standard, and then escalate because the Americans would build against an Anglo-Japanese combination.” Klein, “Whitehall,” p. 475.
to repay war debts to the United States. It was obvious, then, that Britain needed the United States “to make a concession and to abandon her intention to build a great navy” (as the cabinet put it in July 1921). “In all this business,” remarked Churchill, “the United States have a great deal to give and a great deal more to withhold.”\(^{83}\) One last facet of the political context amplified U.S. leverage: Britain feared looking desperate and losing prestige if it appeared to initiate the effort to negotiate naval limits. Instead, it wanted the United States to call for an arms conference and organize formal talks.\(^{84}\)

This delicate political context enabled the United States to set the conference agenda and impose its specific linkage strategy. Its approach was, as one British observer put it, “to accept no [naval arms] treaty unless the [Anglo-Japanese] alliance was scrapped and to out-build all others in naval armaments if no treaty was forthcoming.”\(^{85}\) As the Sprouts explain, the linkages in this bargaining position were indeed credible: “[R]enewal of the Alliance . . . would certainly have given fresh impetus to navalism in America and just as certainly would have put naval limitation beyond the sphere of practical politics.”\(^{86}\)

On July 5, Curzon encouraged Harding to convene a conference of “powers directly concerned . . . to consider all essential matters bearing upon Far East and Pacific Ocean with a view to arriving at a common understanding designed to assure settlement by peaceful means, the elimination of naval warfare, consequent elimination of naval arms, etc.”\(^{87}\) On July 7, Harvey informed Curzon that the United States would welcome any British suggestions “which have as their object, the replacement of [the] Anglo-Japanese Alliance by [a] British-American-Japanese declaration of common policy.”\(^{88}\) At the 1921 Imperial Conference held later that month in London, Curzon explained to the Dominions’ ministers that the United States meant “to put us in a position where we could, without disloyalty to our Allies, terminate the Anglo-Japanese Agreement and substitute something for it, probably of a tripartite character.”\(^{89}\)

In September, Hughes reinforced to the British that it would be essential to

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86. Sprout and Sprout, *Toward a New Order*, p. 128.
89. Memorandum by Mr. Lampson as to whether the Anglo-Japanese Alliance should be directly discussed at the Washington Conference, August 18, 1921, *DBFP*, p. 381.
deal with the Anglo-Japanese Alliance at the Washington Naval Conference. The critical issue was the obligations of military support entailed by the alliance. In October, a British Foreign Office memorandum assessed the solution favored by the United States: if “a Tripartite Agreement is to be substituted for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance Agreement it will be necessary to eliminate from the new instrument military commitments . . . for otherwise the United States can never be induced to become a party. Stripped of military clauses, the Anglo-Japanese Agreement loses its character as an alliance and becomes merely a declaration of policy . . . of a somewhat anodyne nature.”

En route to the conference, the British head delegate, Alfred Balfour, reviewed his agenda for Prime Minister Lloyd George:

The ultimate aim . . . [is] to secure the largest possible limitation of armaments consistent with the safety of the British Empire. It is clear, however, that if satisfactory and durable results are to be achieved in regard to naval disarmament . . . an agreement must be reached in regard to certain political problems which have arisen in China and the Pacific. First and foremost among the latter problems is that of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. . . . [A]dherence to the Alliance in its present form will be very unpopular in the [United States], and will render the conclusion of [an] arrangement for the limitation of armaments extremely difficult to negotiate.

Given those constraints, Balfour proposed to suggest a “draft tripartite agreement,” one object of which was “to bring the existing Anglo-Japanese Alliance to an end.”

Before and during the conference, Hughes controlled the format and negotiated the agenda to reach that end. First, he stymied a British initiative to hold a separate preliminary conference in London to work out the terms of the common Pacific policy agreement with just the British Empire, Japan, China, and the United States before the Washington naval talks. By separating the two negotiations, Curzon had hoped to set the terms of the successor to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance before facing the United States’ considerable leverage at the Washington Naval Conference. In response to Hughes’s insistence that the two conferences must be linked in Washington, Curzon declared on July 14 that he did not “see how [they] could possibly be parts of the same

90. Memorandum by the Secretary of State of a Conversation with the British Ambassador (Geddes), September 20, 1921, FRUS, 1921, Vol. 1, pp. 72–74.
91. Foreign Office Memorandum respecting a Tripartite Agreement, October 22, 1921, DBFP, p. 448.
92. Mr. Balfour (Washington Delegation) to Mr. Lloyd George, November 11, 1921, DBFP, pp. 467–468.
93. Memorandum by the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston on the situation re proposed Conference at Washington, July 24, 1921, DBFP, pp. 345–351.
whole.”

By early August, Curzon relented, deciding that “the best course [was] that [the] American Government having assumed exclusive responsibility for the conference, should prepare the agenda themselves.”

Hughes imposed a tight contingency between the results of both the contemplated naval limits treaty (which would entail U.S. concessions to Britain and Japan) and the common Pacific policy arrangement.

Hughes’s scheme for the Washington Naval Conference included a large multilateral forum that would focus on naval arms limitation and a parallel, secret subgroup of British, Japanese, and U.S. ministers who would negotiate the common Pacific policy agreement. It was in these latter private talks that “it was decided to bury the alliance inside” the Four-Power Treaty.

One of seven treaties to emerge from the Washington Naval Conference, this treaty bound the trio (plus France) in various promises to confer and consult on Pacific affairs and delivered the coup de grâce to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

Its terms were crafted by Hughes to do so. The Four-Power Treaty did not entail any positive alliance obligations. The only concrete action that it dictated was negative—Article IV stipulated that, once ratified by the four principals, the Anglo-Japanese alliance agreement would terminate. Along with that formal device, an explicit political contingency cemented the linkage to the naval arms negotiations. Full ratification of the Four-Power Treaty by the principals was made a prerequisite for any U.S. vote to ratify the Five-Power Naval Limits Treaty.

94. Marquess Curzon of Kedleston to Sir A. Geddes (Washington), July 14, 1921, DBFP, p. 343.


97. Sir A. Geddes (Washington) to the Marquess of Curzon of Kedleston, September 21, 1921, DBFP, p. 401; and Letter from the Marquess of Curzon of Kedleston to Sir A. Geddes (Washington), DBFP, pp. 407–408.


100. Sprout and Sprout, Toward a New Order, p. 132.
EFFECT
U.S. arms control diplomacy helped kill the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1921.101 In a subsequent judgment by Robert Vansittart, who was Curzon’s private secretary in 1921, Britain “abrogated the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to please America.”102 But the notion that Britain dropped the alliance to please the United States does not explain why it was so important for Britain to do so. The United States agreed to restrain a naval buildup in the Pacific that otherwise would have been ruinous for Britain.

The expected wedge effects of terminating the alliance were partially borne out: Anglo-Japanese alignment expectations cratered, but Japan was not restrained in the way the United States expected it would be. In 1931–32, Japan attacked and then conquered Manchuria, without any support from Great Britain. Likewise, Japan had no formal allies when it expanded the war against China in July 1937.

LTBT and the Sino-Soviet Split

Conventional accounts of the 1963 LTBT emphasize that the United States joined the agreement, despite some risk of Soviet cheating, because it would reinforce its nuclear superiority in key areas, diminish the tide of proliferation, discourage the nuclear arms race, reduce atmospheric fallout, and stabilize a rocky political relationship with the Soviet Union.103 Looming behind all of these concerns was the massive Soviet H-bomb test of October 1961, and the frighteningly close brush with nuclear war one year later in the Cuban missile crisis, which focused minds on the search for cooperative solutions to the shared nuclear danger.104 From this perspective, the United States was not interested in aggravating the Sino-Soviet split that was emerging as test ban

104. Seaborg, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban, pp. 175–176, 199.
talks progressed. Our analysis, by contrast, shows how this indirect effect contributed in important ways to the value that the United States placed on the agreement.

In its pursuit of the LTBT, we find that the John F. Kennedy administration embraced the catalyze conflict mechanism to weaken alignment between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. Although the Sino-Soviet split had an ideological origin and had existed since the mid-1950s, the LTBT accelerated it by elevating the Soviet Union and China’s conflict over the latter’s nuclear program, policies toward the West, and the leadership of the international Communist movement.105

MOTIVE
Exacerbating the split had been a goal of the Kennedy administration early on. In August 1960, Soviet specialist George F. Kennan argued, “The main target of our diplomacy should be to heighten the divisive tendencies within the Soviet Bloc. The best means to do this lies in the improvement in our relations with Moscow.”106 Kennan’s thinking shaped the administration’s postelection approach to the Soviets.107 When the Kennedy administration obtained information about China’s nuclear program in 1961, the president regarded a potential Chinese nuclear test “as likely to be historically the most significant and worst event of the 1960s.”108 Also in 1961, the Policy Planning Council recommended “taking advantage of the present Sino-Soviet split in the interests of widening it further or of otherwise exploiting it.”109 Capitalizing on a disintegrating Sino-Soviet alliance, Kennedy wanted to isolate China to counter its nuclear program by cooperating with the Soviet Union over a test ban treaty.110 If

China persisted with its nuclear program, that would deepen China’s isolation and kill the Sino-Soviet alliance.

**CATALYZE CONFLICT MECHANISM**

In April 1961, the United States estimated that as China’s power in the Communist bloc grew, the Soviet Union would find arms control measures more attractive because they would delay China’s nuclear program—to China’s dismay.\(^{111}\) The Kennedy administration was aware of Sino-Soviet tensions in 1961 and was keen to exploit them to further weaken Sino-Soviet alignment. Kennedy thus sought help from the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to stop the Chinese nuclear program. Before the June 1961 Vienna Summit, the United States expected that a Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting would “exacerbate Soviet-Chinese relations.”\(^{112}\) When he met Khrushchev at the summit, Kennedy argued that it was in their shared interest to lower the risk of a general nuclear war by preventing China from acquiring nuclear capability.\(^{113}\) Khrushchev, however, was not at that time comfortable with the idea of a Sino-Soviet split and U.S.-Soviet cooperation against a Soviet partner.\(^{114}\) The summit thus ended without significant progress. Kennedy speculated that Khrushchev’s lack of interest in a test ban was a result of Chinese pressure.\(^{115}\)

Inside the Communist bloc, Sino-Soviet relations worsened. In October 1961, the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union showed that the perceived unity between China and the Soviet Union was vulnerable.\(^{116}\) Still, despite significant differences over the leadership of the Communist movement, Khrushchev’s “peaceful coexistence,” and China’s nuclear program, they tried to manage the split and avoided overtly disparaging one another.\(^{117}\) To the United States, those differences signaled opportunity. In March 1962, administration officials discussed how to exacerbate the split. One of the proposals was to “sound out the Soviets regarding a rapprochement on political issues of mutual interest” while avoiding making deals

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114. Ibid.


with Communist China. We argue that this is an example of the logic of selective accommodation. Arms control was an area of mutual interest, and the Kennedy administration pressed forward with the arms control negotiations, betting that U.S.-Soviet détente would surface the covert Sino-Soviet split.

From 1961 to mid-1962, the Soviet Union and China suppressed their mutual antagonism: Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Mao Zedong needed to recover from the Great Leap Forward and Khrushchev wanted to preserve Communist unity. But for Mao, conflict over leadership of the Communist movement and Khrushchev’s revisionism meant that détente could not last. In March, the Soviet Union raised the issue of a comprehensive test ban agreement with the West, but China opposed it because the Soviets had no rights to stop socialist countries from obtaining nuclear weapons. In August, the United States gave the Soviet Union two proposals: a comprehensive test ban (including atmosphere, outer space, underwater, and underground testing) and a partial test ban (without underground testing). Although the Soviets rejected both proposals, they agreed to resume negotiations. U.S. officials persuaded the Soviet Union to agree to a partial test ban by pointing out that it would benefit from continuing underground tests given the Soviet need to conduct future tests of this kind, which Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin found appealing. China condemned the Soviet Union’s agreement to negotiate as “collusion . . . to prevent us [China] from doing atomic research,” which deepened the Sino-Soviet conflict.

The Cuban missile crisis in October alerted both sides to the danger of an inadvertent nuclear war, and thus worsened the Sino-Soviet split by rekindling the prospect of a U.S.-Soviet–backed test ban treaty. China denounced Khrushchev’s retreat in Cuba and refusal to back China’s war with India.

121. Ibid.
122. Westad, Brothers in Arms, pp. 179–180.
123. Chang, Friends and Enemies, p. 234. In 1963, Khrushchev supported a limited rather than comprehensive test ban treaty because it did not require intrusive inspections.
which further jeopardized the Sino-Soviet détente and pushed the Soviet Union closer to the United States. Concurrently, Khrushchev was under pressure to make his “peaceful coexistence” policy (including the test ban treaty) successful in order to refute China’s assertion that he was being tricked by the West. Meanwhile, the United States developed a framework for a test ban treaty that would limit both China’s and West Germany’s nuclear programs. Targeting West Germany would constitute a significant accommodation of Soviet security interests. Kennedy’s push for a test ban would also fit Khrushchev’s aspiration to improve relations with the West to counter China’s criticism of Khrushchev. Senior U.S. officials were doubtful about the Soviet Union’s leverage over China despite its renewed interest in a test ban treaty. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy argued that the treaty would not be valuable without Soviet assurance that the Chinese would agree to a test ban. Secretary of State Dean Rusk advised Kennedy to seek a Soviet guarantee that China would adhere to the test ban in exchange for U.S. assurance that West Germany would, too. Hence, during a meeting between Kennedy and a Dobrynin-led Soviet delegation in January 1963, Kennedy pressed the Soviets to get China to comply. That month, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) concluded that the Soviet Union and China would “increasingly view each other as hostile rivals and competing powers,” even if they did not repudiate the military alliance.

From early 1963, Kennedy officials studied ways to exacerbate the Sino-Soviet split via test ban negotiations. After concluding that “Khrushchev’s primary interest in a test ban relates to Communist China and West Germany,”

131. Memorandum from the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Kennedy, November 8, 1962, FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. 7: Arms Control and Disarmament, p. 598.
they sought to capitalize on the Soviets’ renewed interests. The Kennedy administration sought to restrain China’s nuclear program by isolating it. For the administration, a test ban agreement would both stifle China’s nuclear ambitions and subvert Sino-Soviet alignment. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff were skeptical about a partial test ban per se, because it would let the Soviet Union continue testing below the detection threshold, and continued testing was essential for “the United States [to] achieve or maintain superiority in all areas of nuclear weapons technology.” But, in the words of U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, even if “it was difficult to support the test ban treaty on national security grounds alone, it could be supported on foreign policy grounds.” Although Kennedy (and the Joint Chiefs of Staff) expected that China would not comply, Nitze was willing to risk some Soviet cheating in order to get its help making China adhere to the test ban. In a May 1963 testimony before the Senate Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, William Foster, argued that a test ban would both combine U.S. and Soviet efforts to stop China’s nuclear program and “have a divisive effect on Sino-Soviet relations,” even if China would not adhere.

Despite China’s growing claims to lead the international Communist movement, in April 1963 Khrushchev still hoped to preserve unity with China under “peaceful coexistence.” His dilemma was whether to align Soviet policies with China or blame it for the collapse of Sino-Soviet relations. If Khrushchev agreed to a test ban treaty, it would be hard to blame China for the split. U.S. officials believed that, besides inspection problems, the “major factor” impeding an improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations was “Moscow’s preoccupation with the Chinese Communist problem.” Kennedy understood that it was this dilemma that inhibited Khrushchev from advancing test

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139. Seaborg, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban, p. 223.
140. Kochavi, A Conflict Perpetuated, p. 219; and Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, April 29, 1963, FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. 7: Arms Control and Disarmament, pp. 689–691.
ban negotiations rather than disagreements over the number of inspections and the status of West Germany. U.S. officials highlighted the need to get Khrushchev on board with a test ban by stressing that Chinese nuclear weapons could “be directed westward against the USSR as well as eastward against the US.” In May 1963, Bundy told Dobrynin that China’s nuclear ambition was an issue of common interest between the United States and the Soviet Union.

To help Khrushchev deflect Chinese pressure, Kennedy mentioned his support of a nuclear test ban treaty during his June 1963 American University commencement address. A Chinese observer in the Peking Review accused Kennedy of “wooing the Soviet Union, opposing China and poisoning Sino-Soviet relations.” After that speech, the White House stated in a memo to the national security bureaucracy, “the President is not choosing sides, in any ostentatious way, between Moscow and Peiping, but his speech is designed to emphasize the positive opportunities for a more constructive and less hostile Soviet policy.” As one of Kennedy’s test ban negotiators conjectured, that implied “the president was taking sides in an unostentatious way. . . . [The] Chinese were regarded by many as . . . the more dangerous of the Communist giants. President Kennedy seemed to be one who held this view (italics in original).” In July 1963, the CIA reported that “the Sino-Soviet rupture has been the by-product of US policy,” and U.S.-Soviet cooperation to impede the Chinese nuclear program through “arms and testing negotiations” was one of the areas that the United States could work on to worsen the split. That month, Khrushchev tried to salvage the relationship with China by proposing to work with it over “peaceful coexistence” at a fraternal party conference.

147. Memorandum from the Assistant Director of Central Intelligence for National Estimates (Kent) to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman), FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. 7: Arms Control and Disarmament, p. 771.
However, China’s June 14 article in the *Peking Review* criticized Soviet cooperation with U.S. imperialism and proposed a complete prohibition of nuclear weapons.\footnote{CPC Central Committee’s Letter in Reply to the CPSU Central Committee’s Letter, “A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement,” *Peking Review*, June 21, 1963, pp. 6–14, https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/peking-review/1963/PR1963-25.pdf.} That caught Khrushchev by surprise.\footnote{Li and Xia, “Jockeying for Leadership,” pp. 54–56.} When Soviet and Chinese leaders met in July to discuss the future of the international Communist movement, they failed to reach any agreements.\footnote{Ibid.} In the words of the leader of the Chinese delegation Deng Xiaoping, the United States “exercise[s] deception and trickery toward other imperialist powers. How can one in such a case believe that there can be total unity between an imperialist country [and] a socialist country?”\footnote{Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, pp. 179–180.} He denounced the test ban as a Soviet attempt to bind “China by the hands and feet through an agreement with the USA.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 381.} On July 14, the Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) responded to the CCP June 14 article with an “Open Letter” that blamed the CCP for the Sino-Soviet split and defended “peaceful coexistence.”\footnote{Communist Party of the Soviet Union, “Open Letter of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to All Party Organizations, to All Communists of the Soviet Union,” *Pravda*, July 14, 1963, https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-soviet-split/cpsu/openletter.htm.} The CPSU and the CCP were openly deadlocked.

On July 15, the first day of the test ban negotiation, Kennedy instructed the lead negotiator, Averell Harriman, to remind Khrushchev of the Chinese nuclear threat and to “elicit Khrushchev’s view of means of limiting or preventing Chinese nuclear development.”\footnote{Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, July 15, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 7: *Arms Control and Disarmament*, p. 801.} After that meeting, Harriman reasoned that Khrushchev’s interest in the test ban was because of his concern over China’s challenges to the Soviet leadership of the international Communist movement.\footnote{Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, July 18, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 7: *Arms Control and Disarmament*, p. 808.} Harriman explained to Kennedy that, since the Soviet Union could not make China agree to the test ban, the Soviets would want all countries to adhere to the ban. Pressure from world opinion rather than just the Soviets would isolate China.\footnote{Ibid.} Thus, the Soviet Union would try to maintain leadership of the Communist bloc and blame the split on China. When U.S. officials and the Soviets agreed to sign the LTBT in late July, China openly accused the Soviet Union of “allying with the US against China” and declared it
would not adhere to such a “dirty fraud.” The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union signed the LTBT on August 5, 1963. The Soviets used the occasion to condemn China’s call for a summit on nuclear disarmament as a “cover for China’s refusal to sign” the LTBT; meanwhile, China was preparing for a complete split of the Communist movement.

EFFECT

Despite some military disadvantages, the United States supported the LTBT for its political merits. President Kennedy instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider both the political and military/technical effects of the treaty. The president, as James Lebovic notes, “obviously thought that the political implications weighed toward ratification.” As the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff, Curtis LeMay, explained in an August 1963 testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the key factor in the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s support for the treaty was political: “we examined the military and the technical aspects and came up with a net disadvantage in that field. . . . Then we examined the political gains that were possible, and we came up with a net advantage there which we thought offset the [military] disadvantages.” One of the key political benefits was that the LTBT “would contribute to a further division of the Sino-Soviet Bloc, and this result would be a major political achievement with important and favorable military implications.” Rusk concurred, pointing out that the LTBT “could contribute to what appears to be a split between the Soviets and the Chinese Communists and . . . may lead to further favorable developments in our relations with the Soviets.”

The LTBT did indeed exacerbate the Sino-Soviet split. China believed that the Soviet Union had joined the United States’ anti-China campaign and betrayed “the principle of proletarian internationalism” by refusing to provide China with nuclear weapons. China condemned the Soviet Union

165. Lebovic, Flawed Logics, p. 54.
166. Seaborg, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban, p. 271.
for embracing “the U.S. imperialists in joyous abandon”; the Soviets, in turn, denounced China’s “fabrications” and “Trotskyite foreign policy.” 170 On August 15, 1963, China declared that it would not join the LTBT, and the Soviets, in return, threatened to expel China from the international Communist movement if it continued to attack the test ban treaty. 171 By 1964, China considered the Soviet Union one of its two main enemies, and in March 1966, it broke interparty ties. 172

According to Gordon Chang, the post-LTBT split occurred exactly how the United States wanted it to. 173 By cementing Soviet and Chinese differences over their respective policies toward the United States, the leadership of the Communist movement, and China’s nuclear program, the LTBT propelled and rendered irreconcilable the Sino-Soviet split. The then deputy director of the CCP Central International Liaison Department, Wu Xiuquan, noted that China perceived the Soviet’s pressure to join the LTBT as an attempt to deny China its nuclear capability. 174 Across the aisle, a retired Soviet military officer, Victor Gobarev, argued that “one of the principal causes of the Split was China’s insistence on pursing their nuclear weapons program at any costs.” 175 One of those costs was arguably the Sino-Soviet alliance. As Lorenz Lüthi summarizes, though, “the ground for the Sino-Soviet rift” was already prepared, the LTBT “helped it to burst into the open.” 176

**SALT and the U.S.-China Rapprochement**

The Soviet Union attempted to use SALT I from 1969 to 1972 to dampen U.S.-China rapprochement. Studies of Soviet arms control policy in the early détente period tend to highlight direct-effect incentives: to gain U.S. recognition of strategic parity; to reduce the risks of a nuclear war that could not be won; and to protect Soviet military advantages while blunting those of the United States. 177 These studies suggest that the China factor did not exert sig-
nificant effects on Soviet and U.S. maneuvers during SALT I negotiations.\textsuperscript{178} Some analysts, however, suggest that SALT might have weakened alignment within NATO by creating a false sense of security or igniting fears of superpower collusion.\textsuperscript{179} In contrast, our framework shows both how SALT’s wedge effects extended to the U.S.-China-Soviet Union strategic triangle and how, in particular, the Soviets used the peace offensive mechanism to stave off U.S.-China collusion.

**MOTIVE**

As relations with China deteriorated in the late 1960s, the Soviet Union was afraid of Beijing improving its ties with the United States. After the CCP broke off ties in 1966, the 1969 border clash reinforced Sino-Soviet antagonism.\textsuperscript{180} The Soviet Union had by then identified China as a primary threat; moreover, U.S. signals during the 1969 clash “could only be construed as opposition to a Soviet attack on China [and] resonate[d] with expressed apprehension over a coincidence in Sino-American anti-Soviet interests that might draw Beijing and Washington together.”\textsuperscript{181} By embracing SALT, the Soviet Union had two major goals: (1) to concentrate on the threat coming from China after the 1969 border conflict, and (2) to prevent an anti-Soviet U.S.-China alignment.\textsuperscript{182} The strategic triangle schema that animated President Richard Nixon’s and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger’s “grand design” of pursuing both détente with the Soviet Union and rapprochement with China presaged these two Soviet motivations.\textsuperscript{183} More precisely, they were an expected response to the leverage that the United States gained from holding a “China card.” The Soviet Union’s impulse to divide the United States and China—by accommodating the United States through strategic arms control—was partly a


consequence of the United States becoming a “pivot” between the two communist powers.184

**PEACE OFFENSIVE MECHANISM**

The Soviet Union was a common enemy of both the United States and China in the late 1960s and it worried, with good reason, about a U.S.-China convergence against it.185 During the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, the Soviet Union and the United States contemplated negotiations to address the huge increase in both sides’ nuclear arsenals. However, the Soviet 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia impeded the plan. Talks began only after Nixon came into office.186 In August 1969, as the Sino-Soviet border conflict was ongoing, a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) predicted that the Soviet Union would seek to improve relations with the West to “contain” China.187 When the Soviet Union began the SALT negotiations in November 1969, it did so with the Chinese threat in mind. The Soviet wedge motive was consistent throughout the three-year negotiations over strategic arms limitations. Although both the Soviet and U.S. officials did not discuss China explicitly during the negotiations, the chief U.S. negotiator at SALT, Gerard Smith, concluded that China was “a constant presence” and a key reason for the Soviet Union’s participation in SALT.188 Similarly, when the talks began, Dobrynin depicted them as “a barometer of our [Soviet] relations with the United States.”189

In 1969, the Soviet Union still believed that it was in an advantageous position in the strategic triangle.190 Taiwan, the Vietnam War, and China’s representation at the United Nations would impede U.S.-China rapprochement.191 That year, the Soviet Union initiated the first of several attempts to settle its

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border dispute with China via a nonaggression treaty and a new border agreement. Meanwhile, Nixon stalled strategic arms talks to decide how to link them with Vietnam and Middle East priorities. The Soviet Union was prepared to wait Nixon out because it opposed arms control linkage.

Because they disagreed about the scope of an agreement, SALT negotiators believed that neither side felt “any overriding need” to reach a deal, and that the first one would be modest. In June 1970, however, the United States detected signs that the Soviets were using SALT negotiations to not only pursue arms control but also isolate China by facilitating U.S.-Soviet cooperation against it. We argue that the Soviet Union used a peace offensive logic to reassure the United States of its cooperative intentions, which the Soviets would turn against China in an effort to dampen a potential U.S.-China balancing coalition. This logic was embodied in a proposal by the Soviet Union’s lead negotiator, Vladimir Semenov, to lessen the likelihood that a provocative nuclear attack of a third country would cause an inadvertent U.S.-Soviet nuclear war.

Raymond Garthoff, the lead CIA analyst supporting the U.S. SALT negotiators, described the Soviet proposal as a highly political one “that rais[ed] delicate and serious questions of condominium that concerned American relations with its allies and, above all, China.” Indeed, the abstract scenario of such an attack tapped into the U.S. strategic community’s longstanding, thinly veiled, anti-China fear. Nuclear strategy and arms control specialists called it the problem of “catalytic war,” and as the 1960s progressed, the specter of a nuclear-capable China as provocateur was their central concern. The Soviets’ provocative attack proposal thus envisioned a kind of bilateral crisis management hotline mechanism that leading arms control theorists had championed. But it also called for U.S.-Soviet “joint action to prevent or retaliate against provocative attack” by a third party. For a potential attack, the Soviet Union and the United States would exchange information about their respective prepara-

198. Ibid., p. 175.
tions, use necessary measures to stop it, consult to prevent “an automatic start of nuclear war” if nuclear weapons were used, and pledge to retaliate against the provocateur.\textsuperscript{201}

A U.S. State Department internal document on the political aspect of the proposal concluded that “China is the primary object of the proposed agreement, even though Semenov does not say it outright. The Soviet Union would evidently like to do what it can to reduce any chances of improved US-Chinese relations.”\textsuperscript{202} Semenov was more concerned about the overall political aspect of the proposal than its specific details, because the Soviet Union often worried China would stir “troubles between the USSR and the US.”\textsuperscript{203} Helmut Sonnenfeldt, a counselor to Kissinger at the National Security Council (NSC), called the proposal “tantamount to an alliance against China” and possibly “the most important Soviet political initiative in years.”\textsuperscript{204} Because the arrangement would give the Soviet Union the justification to attack China, he advised “it might be best to kill the anti-China concept from the start.”\textsuperscript{205} Smith, too, speculated that the Soviet insistence on the proposal reflected “a high-level” political decision.\textsuperscript{206} Kissinger explained to Dobrynin that “political cooperation implying a major change in international alignments and clearly aimed against third countries was out of the question.”\textsuperscript{207} Consequently, the Nixon administration rejected the Soviet proposal at that time.\textsuperscript{208}

Throughout the end of 1970 and early 1971, negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States remained stalled over antiballistic missiles, the scope of offensive weapons, and an agreement on Berlin’s status. In April 1971, U.S. leaders believed, however, that the incentive to limit U.S.-China rapprochement would pull the Soviet Union forward. Nixon specifically said, “without China, they [the Soviet Union] never would have agreed to the SALT.”\textsuperscript{209} That proved true in May, when the United States and the Soviet

\textsuperscript{201} Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{206} Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{208} Still, the proposal would later become the 1973 Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War. Conversation among President Nixon, the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Assistant to the President (Haldeman), April 23, 1971, \textit{FRUS}, 1969–1976, Vol. 32: \textit{SALT I}, 1969–1972, p. 460.
Union broke the deadlock over the linkage between defensive and offensive arms. One of the things that motivated the Soviets to compromise was concern about signals of warming U.S.-China relations that appeared the prior month, most notably through Ping-Pong Diplomacy. The Soviets wanted to reach an agreement to avert consolidation of U.S.-China relations against the Soviet Union. The peace offensive logic thus guided the Soviet accommodation.

In the months that followed, Kissinger’s secret visit to China in July 1971 alarmed the Soviet Union and propelled it to improve relations with the United States. In August 1971, Dobrynin probed Kissinger about whether the delay in announcing Nixon’s visit to the Soviet Union in 1972 was an “anti-Soviet” maneuver, a suggestion that Kissinger denied. Still, the NSC concluded that the Soviet Union’s fear of isolation and its wish to isolate China contributed to improved relations between the United States and the Soviet Union in late 1971—including the 1971 Four Power Agreement on Berlin, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko’s visit to the United States to discuss arms control, and the announcement of the 1972 Moscow summit. Sonnenfeldt agreed that the Soviets relaxed their stance on ABM negotiations in August and September 1971 in reaction to the announcement of Nixon’s impending visit to China.

When Nixon visited China in February 1972, the Soviets downplayed Vietnam as an obstacle to reaching arms control agreements. An April 1972 NIE saw the Soviet Union fearing a U.S.-China combination and eager to foster better terms with the United States and progress in strategic arms talks before the Moscow summit. The NSC anticipated that the Soviets might use the summit to probe U.S. officials about their relations with the Chinese and warn them against closer ties to China. Another NSC report noted that Leonid

Brezhnev, general secretary of the CPSU, saw the summit as an “opportunity to demonstrate a closer, more substantively-grounded relationship with the US than Peking can command,” and wanted to prevent an anti-Soviet U.S.-China collusion by signing bilateral agreements, including arms control, at the summit.\footnote{Ibid., p. 913.}

The Moscow summit’s results confirmed those expectations. In May 1972, Nixon and Brezhnev inked the SALT and ABM treaties.\footnote{Kozyrev, “Soviet Policy,” p. 264.} According to Soviet specialist Jonathan Haslam, Brezhnev “saw SALT as a demonstrable success in blocking the route to an [U.S.-China] anti-Soviet alliance.”\footnote{Haslam, Russia’s Cold War, p. 263.} In a May 1972 presentation to the Central Committee of the CPSU, Brezhnev emphasized the importance of constant dialog and improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations to prevent the U.S.-China convergence, a theme that would be repeated in the same venue the next year.\footnote{Kozyrev, “Soviet Policy,” p. 264.} A Soviet briefing for the East German government in June explained that “the results of the talks, our agreements with the USA, objectively create a serious obstacle with which to disrupt [China’s] foreign policy toward a Sino-American rapprochement on an anti-Soviet basis and lessen the likelihood of such an outcome.”\footnote{Quoted in Haslam, Russia’s Cold War, p. 263, original source in fn. 376.} The NSC mirrored the Soviet Union’s assessment.\footnote{Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff, undated, FRUS, 1969–1976, Vol. 32: SALT I, 1969–1972, p. 817. The report added, “the demonstration of a Superpower relationship exploitable against China, was an underlying Soviet motive in the past negotiations, and is an incentive for keeping the dialogue alive in the future [italics in original].”}

**EFFECT**

The Soviet Union’s attempt to use SALT to dampen an emerging U.S.-China alignment partly worked. Despite the rapprochement after Nixon’s February 1972 visit to China, the two sides still had fundamental differences over their policies toward the Soviet Union. China sought a “horizontal line” strategy that entailed an anti-Soviet alliance stretching from Japan to Europe to the United States.\footnote{Wang Zhongchun, “The Soviet Factor in Sino-American Normalization, 1969–1979” in Kirby, Ross, and Li, eds., Normalization of U.S.-China Relations, pp. 156–157.} The United States, in contrast, promoted both détente and U.S.-China rapprochement.\footnote{Ibid.} China was skeptical about a U.S.-Soviet détente because it knew that the Soviet Union was using détente to isolate China. Thus, China warned the United States against appeasing the Soviets to “push the ill waters of the Soviet Union . . . eastward.”\footnote{Evelyn Goh, “Nixon, Kissinger, and the ‘Soviet Card’ in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–} Kissinger responded to
China that improving U.S.-Soviet relations were aimed at reassuring the Soviets of the U.S. intention not to encircle them, and that China should wait for diplomatic normalization while the United States tempered Soviet ambitions.\(^{228}\) We contend that the Soviet pursuit of strategic arms control with the United States from 1969 to 1972 weakened alignment between China and the United States and helped to delay the normalization of U.S.-China diplomatic ties to 1978. Ultimately, the wedge motive’s importance was revealed by its diminution: U.S.-China rapprochement slowed down in 1973–74, and the Soviet Union’s efforts to negotiate SALT II also decreased because it was less concerned about U.S.-China collusion.\(^{229}\)

**Conclusion**

Although states have used strategic arms control to promote stability, cut costs, or secure a military edge, they have also exploited it to divide opponents. We have argued that this calculus was a key component of states’ decisions to negotiate the Washington Naval Treaty, the LTBT, and the SALT I. The recurrence of the wedge strategy logic, across the pre- and post-nuclear eras and different adversarial alignment trajectories, shows the reach of the theory.

The wedge logic remains relevant today. First, we show how the United States can employ the extension of the New START and future arms control agreements to drive a wedge between China and Russia. Second, we contend that the United States must be cautious about arms control deals with North Korea.

In today’s context of the United States-Russia-China triangle, the United States increasingly worries about the growing strategic partnership between Russia and China.\(^{230}\) Such concern is reasonable.\(^{231}\) And it has inspired some analysts to call for the United States to look for ways to cooperate with Moscow that will distance Russia from China and allow the United States to better concentrate on China.\(^{232}\) One of the most important ways for the United

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2. 228. Ibid., pp. 490–491.
5. 231. In October 2020, Putin speculated that a Russia-China military alliance would be possible and such cooperation could help the two countries regularly hold ground and naval drills and exchange military technologies and practices. “Military Alliance with China to Tie Russia’s Hands, Scare Off Partners, Says Expert,” *TASS Russian News Agency*, October 30, 2020, https://tass.com/defense/1218485.
States to cooperate with Russia is via strategic arms control. When the United States and Russia extended New START in February 2021, U.S. President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. conveyed to Russian President Vladimir Putin that the United States wants to work with Russia on matters concerning strategic stability and arms control. Negotiating a bridge from New START to a successor framework of U.S.-Russia strategic arms control could have the direct effect of not only restraining an arms race but also, as the peace offensive logic suggests, improving the United States’ ties with Russia and dampening Russia-China convergence by unwinding their common threat perceptions, especially if the new pact is coupled with other initiatives to conciliate Russia.

The future focus of U.S.-Russia strategic arms control should remain bilateral, and it should be coupled with other measures to reduce tensions and build new areas of cooperation between the United States and Russia. Moreover, better U.S.-Russia ties can help the United States build trust with Russia’s traditional partners like India and Vietnam.

If the United States can use strategic arms control to divide adversaries, so can others. North Korea has long opposed the continuation of the U.S.-South Korea alliance, and one of the ways for North Korea to split the alliance could be an arms control deal with the United States that limits North Korea’s development of an intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) capability in exchange for reducing U.S. security commitments to South Korea via the specific linkage logic. This reduction could include withdrawing U.S. troops from South Korea, rolling back U.S. extended deterrence, or halting joint military exercises. Such a deal may be hard for the United States to turn down given North Korea’s unimpeded development of nuclear and missile capabilities and the

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ability of those ICBMs to target the U.S. East Coast, which is the essence of alliance decoupling.237

Strategic arms control is, among other things, a tool of power politics and one of many ways for states to increase their net security. At the level of grand strategy, the logic of arms control wedge strategies thus points, somewhat heretically, to an important possibility: Although it may be optimal for states to gain advantage in both direct effects (i.e., increased stability, limited war, and reduced expenses) and indirect effects of strategic arms control, they may achieve large gains in security and relative power from the indirect political effects alone, despite some disadvantageous arms limits in the treaty terms. If the indirect benefits are expected to be more rewarding than direct ones, a state may rationally accept unbalanced or otherwise imperfect terms to improve the chances of a successful deal that allows it to drive a wedge between its adversaries. What appears to be a negotiating failure (i.e., the agreement terms are technically disadvantageous) may be a victory for the state’s larger strategic goals. The conventional focus on wins and losses in bilateral bargaining over the formal terms and direct effects of strategic arms control will miss, or underrate, this outside game, and misconstrue the nature and significance of them.