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**The Dilemma of Bilateral Asymmetric  
Alliances: Exploring How the Stronger  
State Becomes Entrapped by the Weaker  
State**

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### Abstract

*The dynamics of alliances in international politics often come with the risk of entrapment, where major powers might find themselves drawn into conflicts contrary to their interests due to obligations to weaker allies. While most studies highlight weaker states being influenced by their stronger counterparts, there are notable instances where the opposite occurs. This paper uses the prospect theory to illuminate two situations where dominant states are more susceptible to entrapment. Firstly, when major powers foresee a significant shift in their security environment due to a weaker ally's potential defeat, and secondly, when they believe that their strategic position would be considerably weakened without the alliance, and finding an alternative powerful ally is improbable. To demonstrate this, the paper examines Germany's situation during the July Crisis and China's stance before the Korean War. Both historical instances provide insights into why powerful nations might be led into conflicts by their lesser partners. This research aims to delve deep into the intricacies of asymmetric alliances and provide a fresh perspective on the concept of entrapment in alliance politics.*

The entrapment problem of alliances has long been a popular topic among scholars of alliance politics. The act of forming an alliance with another state invariably introduces the risk of entrapment, whereby member states may be coerced into participating in unwanted wars that run contrary to their interests. Entrapment typically occurs when the alliance is deemed indispensable by the trapped member, thereby precluding the possibility of exit. In current literature, researchers have focused heavily on the bilateral asymmetric alliance, and in particular on how stronger powers may employ various levers and strategies to manage weaker members and minimize the risk of entrapment.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars have argued that entrapment may be more frequently instigated by stronger powers, as weaker members are often compelled to relinquish their autonomy in exchange for the stronger power's commitment to preserving their security.<sup>2</sup> As such, the alliance policy may be dominated by the stronger power. A classic example of entrapment occurred during the Napoleonic Wars, when France entrapped the Confederated States of the Rhine, the client state of Napoleon, into invading Russia in 1812, despite the operation running counter to their interests.<sup>3</sup>

The phenomenon of stronger powers being entrapped into unwanted wars by their weaker allies has challenged the prevailing belief that asymmetric alliances are beneficial to the stronger party. In order to shed light on this counterintuitive phenomenon, this article would adopt the prospect theory and to identify two circumstances under which the stronger power is vulnerable to entrapment. First, when the stronger power perceives that its weaker ally might be defeated by the adversary without its military intervention, and that such a defeat would lead to a rapid deterioration of its security environment compared to the status quo, it is likely that the stronger power within the alliance would become entrapped. This

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<sup>1</sup> See Michael Beckley, "The Myth of Entangling Alliances: Reassessing the Security Risks of U.S. Defense Pacts," *International Security* 39, no. 4 (April 2015): 7–48, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00197](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00197), Brett V Benson, *Constructing International Security: Alliances, Deterrence, and Moral Hazard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chapter 5., Victor D. Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security* 34, no. 3 (January 2010): 158–96, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2010.34.3.158>, Tongfi Kim, "Why Alliances Entangle but Seldom Entrap States," *Security Studies* 20, no. 3 (July 2011): 350–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.599201>.

<sup>2</sup> James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (November 1991), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111499>.

<sup>3</sup> Paul W Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848* (Editorial: Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

perception is rooted in the reference point of the status quo, which becomes the benchmark against which the stronger power evaluates potential gains and losses. The stronger power may feel a greater sense of loss from the weakening or loss of the weaker ally than it would from any potential gains from staying out of the conflict.

Secondly, when the possibility of aligning with other major powers to improve its future security environment and interests after losing the weaker alliance member is deemed unlikely, the stronger power would more likely to be entrapped. In this scenario, the stronger power perceives that the loss of the weaker ally would lead to a significant reduction in its overall power, and it is uncertain whether other major powers would be willing to compensate for this loss. This increases the pressure on the stronger power to remain committed to the alliance.

To substantiate these hypotheses, this article undertakes a comparative analysis of two historical cases: Germany during the July Crisis and China prior to the Korean War. Despite both states' reluctance to engage in warfare, they were entrapped by their weaker allies. By tracing the historical cases of these two states, this study aims to illustrate the mechanisms and logic underlying the hypotheses. Specifically, this article seeks to explore the causal mechanisms that explain why stronger powers may be trapped in unwanted wars by weaker allies under certain circumstances. Through a rigorous examination of the historical events and actors, this study aims to shed light on the utility of the hypotheses in understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of asymmetric alliances

In addition to bridging an academic void through the examination of asymmetric alliances, this inquiry holds significant contemporary relevance. Over the course of the past century, there have been several wars where the entrapment of a stronger power by a weaker ally within an asymmetric alliance precipitated catastrophic losses for the nations involved. Like the two pertinent cases that the article will delve into, which serve as illuminating examples. In the case of World War I, the conflict witnessed the tragic loss of 9.7 million military personnel from over two dozen nations, as well as the demise of more than 6.8 million civilians due to war-related starvation and acts of genocide.<sup>4</sup>

The Korean War, though not as calamitous as World War I in terms of casualties, nonetheless resulted in a significant loss of life. The conflict led to the deaths of approximately 150,000 troops from the United States and other United Nations member states. Additionally, nearly one million South Koreans lost their lives during the war. From the communist side, there were approximately 800,000 military casualties, and in excess of 200,000 North Korean civilians perished.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore vital to acknowledge that major powers engaged in asymmetric alliances often do not initially anticipate entanglement in such predicaments. Accordingly, it is plausible to argue that preemptive measures may have averted these unfortunate outcomes. In the contemporary geopolitical climate, escalating tensions between China and Taiwan, as well as North and South Korea, underscore the potential for a reemergence of entrapment scenarios. Such circumstances could feasibly precipitate similar calamities, ensnaring the United States and other major powers in a potentially devastating conflict. As a result, it is of critical importance to identify the factors that may precipitate the ensnaring of a superior power within an asymmetric bilateral alliance

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<sup>4</sup> Patrick Kiger, "How Many People Died in World War I?," HISTORY, April 19, 2023, <https://www.history.com/news/how-many-people-died-in-world-war-i>.

<sup>5</sup> "First U.S. Fatality in the Korean War," HISTORY, July 6, 2020, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/first-u-s-fatality-in-the-korean-war>.

by a weaker member. Comprehending these dynamics could prove to be instrumental in mitigating the risk of similar catastrophes in the future. Faced with analogous scenarios, political leaders equipped with a thorough understanding of the dynamics of asymmetric alliances will be better poised to discern and implement effective diplomatic strategies, potentially circumventing the outbreak of conflict.

This article comprises three main sections. The first section offers a comprehensive definition and introduction of entrapment in alliance politics and provides a thorough review of the current literature related to the asymmetric alliance management problem. The second section advances and theorizes the hypotheses regarding the causal mechanisms that explain why stronger powers may be trapped into unwanted wars by weaker allies under certain circumstances. Drawing upon the theoretical framework developed in the second section, the third section of the article offers a detailed exploration and analysis of the two comparative historical cases: Germany during the July Crisis and China prior to the Korean War.

### **Entrapment in Asymmetric Alliances: Definition and Literature Review**

Generally, an alliance is characterized as a formal or informal accord established between two or more states with the intention of bolstering the national security of the participating entities. It embodies a sustained security collaboration among member states, encompassing an element of strategic foresight and mutual commitment to render military assistance or benevolent neutrality.<sup>6</sup> The study of alliance politics constitutes a prominent facet within the realm of international relations scholarship. The issue of entrapment constitutes a salient aspect of the alliance security dilemma in alliance politics study, as elucidated by Glenn Snyder. According to his argument, alliance members frequently experience apprehensions of either abandonment by their partners or entrapment by them. The root of such concerns stems from the fact that an ally may have alternative partners and may opt to switch to another if it becomes dissatisfied with the present partnership. The fear of abandonment arises from the subjective probability that the partner may defect and the costs one would incur if it were to do so, a scenario that is highly plausible due to the existence of alliance alternatives and the natural tendency of statesmen to think in worst-case terms.<sup>7</sup>

Conversely, entrapment indicates that the alliance member may be compelled, by virtue of its commitment, to participate in a war over interests of the ally that it does not share. The ally may act recklessly or take a more assertive stance towards its opponent than one would prefer, under the assumption that it has the support of the other member. The cost of abandonment primarily pertains to the loss of security, whereas the cost of entrapment concerns the loss of autonomy.<sup>8</sup> The extent of the ally's interest at stake, its confidence in the other member's support, and its tolerance for risk are determinants of its likelihood to challenge and stand firm against its adversary. The firmer the commitment to the ally, the higher the probability of being coerced to support it. Additionally, the dangers of entrapment manifest in various forms, including the ally's unexpected and direct attack on the opponent,

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<sup>6</sup> Patricia A Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances : Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 34.

<sup>7</sup> Glenn H Snyder, *Alliance Politics : Version 2* (Ithaca, Ny: Cornell University Press, 2007), 180.

<sup>8</sup> Snyder, 181

its provocation of the opponent to attack, or its adoption of a resolute position in crisis bargaining, leading to the outbreak of war.<sup>9</sup>

In the majority of the literature on alliance politics, scholars typically emphasize that in an asymmetric bilateral alliance, which consists of one stronger member and one weaker member, the stronger member is able to efficiently control and manage the alliance, thereby avoiding issues of entrapment or abandonment caused by the weaker side. An asymmetric bilateral alliance can be quantitatively measured using the National Material Capabilities index from the Correlates of War. If the weaker state in the alliance has less than half of the index compared to the stronger power, the alliance is considered asymmetric. This is because such a scenario indicates that the stronger state's total scores in military expenditure, military personnel, energy consumption, iron and steel production, urban population, and total population are significantly higher than those of the weaker state.<sup>10</sup> However, in contrast, the mechanism through which the weaker member might constrain or entrap the stronger side is seldom explored in the literature.

James Morrow raised the idea in the 1990s that a stronger power in an asymmetric alliance could effectively control the weaker power. According to Morrow, the stronger power enjoys a more secure environment due to its greater military capability, while the weaker power has low levels of security and high levels of autonomy. In order for the weaker power to enter into an alliance with a stronger power and gain security, it must trade its autonomy with the stronger power. In exchange for this concession of autonomy, the weaker power often provides its territory as a strategic location for the projection of the stronger power's power or agrees to allow the major power to intervene in the weaker power's domestic politics. This grants the stronger power sufficient leverage to regulate and manage the weaker power's behavior. Consequently, since the weaker side of the asymmetric alliance trades its autonomy to the stronger side, the policy and action of the alliance would be predominantly influenced by the stronger power to provide enough security for the weaker power. The weaker power would not have enough leverage to impact the stronger power's actions, including the risk of entrapment into an unwanted war.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, Victor Cha further investigated the notion that stronger powers can more effectively control weaker powers through asymmetric alliances. He posits that when two countries with asymmetric capabilities form a bilateral alliance, the alliance can become a potent tool of control. If the weaker partner depends on the stronger member for specific benefits, then the stronger patron can exert considerable leverage. Cha's powerplay model demonstrates that major powers can enhance their capabilities and increase their leverage by establishing a series of bilateral agreements with allies, rather than diluting their leverage in a multilateral forum. He cites several cases in East Asia to illustrate how the United States controlled Taiwan and Korea through bilateral agreements, which not only maximized the

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<sup>9</sup> Snyder, 182

<sup>10</sup> A dataset from the Correlates of War incorporates a measurement of a nation's power, consisting of six indicators: military expenditure, military personnel, energy consumption, iron and steel production, urban population, and total population. These indicators are utilized to construct the widely used Composite Indicator of National Capability (CINC), which serves as the foundation for assessing national capability. Spanning the period from 1816 to 2016, this dataset provides valuable insights into the dynamics of national power and capability. Clear detail please check the COW's website: <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities/>

<sup>11</sup> James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (November 1991), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111499>.

U.S. leverage but also prevented the United States from being drawn into an unwanted war with the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup>

Tongfi Kim argues that the issue of entrapment can be avoided by the stronger member of an alliance through careful design of the alliance agreement. When a state is concerned about the risk of entrapment, it is more likely to impose conditions on its alliance obligations. Moreover, a state with stronger bargaining power compared to its ally is more likely to impose conditions on its alliance obligations. States are concerned about entrapment because they cannot control their ally's actions and may have to bear the consequences of such actions. By imposing conditions on their alliance obligations, states create escape clauses and limit their alliance commitments. The fear of entrapment explains the motivations behind conditional alliance obligations, while the bargaining power of a state explains its ability to impose such conditions. Weaker states often have to accept the risk of entrapment more frequently than stronger states.<sup>13</sup>

Michael Beckley presents several strategies to avoid the entrapment issue. The first strategy is to create loopholes, which aligns with Kim's argument. States can provide their allies with escape clauses or flexibility in the conditions under which they must provide assistance. Such loopholes are common in asymmetric alliances, as stronger powers can limit their commitments to weaker allies while demanding unconditional loyalty in return. The second strategy is sidestepping, where states may choose to stay on the sidelines or provide minimal support to allies if vital interests are not threatened, or they may abandon allies altogether. Stronger powers can also mitigate the risk of entrapment by diversifying their portfolio of alliances. Most allies are likely to favor restraint, as their security would be compromised if the stronger power were to escalate a faraway conflict. Finally, Beckley suggests that alliances can prevent conflicts by committing members to form a united front against aggression.<sup>14</sup>

Further, Brett Benson has provided insights on how stronger powers can design alliance contracts to mitigate the entrapment risk associated with weaker allies. Benson contends that the nature of the alliance commitment formed by the stronger power depends on the extent to which the weaker power shares common security interests with the stronger side. In cases where there is a high degree of shared security concerns, the stronger side is likely to enter into an unconditional commitment with the weaker ally. Conversely, if the two sides only share partial security interests, and there remains a possibility that the weaker ally may initiate a conflict, the stronger power would prefer to form a conditional commitment alliance. Furthermore, when the stronger power perceives a high risk of the weaker ally initiating a conflict, the stronger side may opt to form a pure conditional or probabilistic commitment alliance, which restricts the weaker member's obligations or provides an avenue for the stronger side to avoid entrapment altogether.<sup>15</sup>

Upon examining the body of alliance politics literature, it becomes evident that scholars have extensively investigated the mechanisms and rationale underlying the stronger

<sup>12</sup> Victor D. Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security* 34, no. 3 (January 2010): 158–96, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2010.34.3.158>.

<sup>13</sup> Tongfi Kim, "Why Alliances Entangle but Seldom Entrap States," *Security Studies* 20, no. 3 (July 2011): 350–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.599201>.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Beckley, "The Myth of Entangling Alliances: Reassessing the Security Risks of U.S. Defense Pacts," *International Security* 39, no. 4 (April 2015): 7–48, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00197](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00197).

<sup>15</sup> Brett V Benson, *Constructing International Security: Alliances, Deterrence, and Moral Hazard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chapter 5.

alliance member's tactics of controlling and constraining the weaker alliance member to prevent the entrapment dilemma. However, a critical gap in the literature exists as there is a paucity of systematic research into the specific conditions under which the weaker alliance member can successfully entrap the stronger power into a conflict. Addressing this research gap, this article aims to shed light on this understudied aspect of alliance politics and provide insights into how the weaker ally can strategically utilize its position to ensnare the stronger power into a military confrontation

### Theories and Hypothesis

As most scholars argue, weaker alliance members typically possess less leverage to influence alliance policy compared to stronger powers, given that the latter are usually better positioned to ensure their own security while weaker states often need to make concessions in exchange for the protection of a stronger ally. In such circumstances, it is rational for the stronger power to utilize its leverage to restrict the weaker ally's actions or defect from the alliance if the weaker power engages in a conflict that does not threaten the sovereignty or security of the stronger ally. This is because warfare against any nation, whether strong or weak, is invariably expensive in economic terms and involves the sacrifice of soldiers' lives on the battlefield. No rational statesman would willingly enter into an unnecessary war and incur such costs without preserving or gaining any interests.<sup>16</sup> In essence, unless engaging in warfare directly benefits a state's own interests—such as when not fighting could risk its sovereignty or security—other forms of conflict are often costly and unnecessary.

Moreover, given that the weaker ally lacks sufficient leverage to enforce the stronger ally into an unwanted war, it is almost impossible for the weaker side to entrap the stronger power into a conflict. A prominent example of this is during the Cold War when Chiang Kai-shek sought to initiate a conflict against the People's Republic of China and requested assistance from Washington. However, the United States considered the risks of warring with China to be too high, as it could potentially draw the Soviet Union into the conflict. As a result, Washington consistently restricted Chiang's behavior by threatening to reduce alliance commitments.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, weaker allies successfully entrapping stronger powers into wars is an abnormal phenomenon.

Nevertheless, although the phenomenon of weaker allies entrapping stronger powers into conflicts is rare, a review of relevant historical events suggests that two circumstances increase the likelihood of such occurrences. The first circumstance can be analyzed using the prospect theory. As many scholars have noted, the status quo of the security environment serves as the reference point.<sup>18</sup> If the stronger member of the alliance perceives that it may lose the support of the weaker member, especially if the weaker member is certain to be defeated in a conflict, such a scenario could cause the stronger power's future security environment to deteriorate compared to the status quo. In this situation, the stronger power is likely to resort to military intervention in order to mitigate further losses and maintain the status quo of the security environment.

Prospect theory is a decision-making theory that suggests people tend to evaluate choices with respect to a reference point, behaving risk-aversely in a domain of gains but

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<sup>16</sup> James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 03 (June 1995): 383, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300033324>.

<sup>17</sup> Victor D Cha, *POWERPLAY: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia.*, 2018, chapter 4.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Mercer, "PROSPECT THEORY and POLITICAL SCIENCE," *Annual Review of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (June 15, 2005): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104911>.

risk-acceptant in a domain of losses. This means that in a disadvantageous situation, people may choose risky behavior to reverse or worsen their losses, even if the probability of further losses is greater than the probability of gains.<sup>19</sup> In social science, scholars generally support the use of five major standards as reference points: aspiration level, heuristics, analogies, emotions, or the status quo.<sup>20</sup>

As stated in the aforementioned article, the reference point for this study is the status quo of the security environment. This standard is selected for several reasons. Firstly, it is commonly accepted in international relations that a state's primary goal is to ensure its survival.<sup>21</sup> If the security environment deteriorates, the survival of the regime could be negatively impacted. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that no state would want to see its security environment worsen without taking any action. Furthermore, in alliance politics, scholar Kai He has already proven the validity of using the prospect theory by setting the reference point as the status quo. He tested that when the prospect of a state's threat level is worse than the status quo, they may form different alliances to bear the risk.<sup>22</sup> While Kai He's argument pertains to a different topic, his research supports the notion that using the status quo as a reference point is useful. Hence, it is plausible to use this standard as a reference point in this study. Finally, according to the logic of rational-choice analysis, espoused by the majority of scholars, it is highly improbable for the stronger member of an asymmetric alliance to be entrapped by the weaker side. This is because the major power typically possesses greater leverage to control the minor power, making entrapment unlikely. However, the prospect theory provides an alternative explanation, incorporating psychological factors instead of solely relying on cost-benefit analysis. This theory offers insights into why such abnormal phenomena may occur, shedding light on the complexities of alliance dynamics and decision-making processes.

In examining the cases of Germany during the July Crisis and China prior to the Korean War, it is evident that both countries initially demonstrated reluctance to engage in the conflicts that were provoked by their weaker alliance members. However, upon examining the relevant historical documents of both states and investigating related journal articles, it is apparent that both countries were ultimately entrapped in the conflicts. This entrapment occurred after they evaluated the likelihood of their weaker alliance members, Austria-Hungary for Germany and North Korea for China, being defeated. Both countries perceived that such a defeat would impose greater threats and degrade their future security environment more than the existing status quo. Hence, such concerns ultimately dragged them into initially unwanted wars.<sup>23</sup>

H1: If the stronger member of an asymmetric alliance perceives that the defeat of the weaker member by another state would result in a deterioration of its security environment

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<sup>19</sup> Rose McDermott, "Prospect Theory in Political Science: Gains and Losses from the First Decade," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 2 (April 2004): 289–312, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00372.x>.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Mercer, "PROSPECT THEORY and POLITICAL SCIENCE," *Annual Review of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (June 15, 2005): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104911>.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "Why Is There No NATO in Asia?" Revisited: Prospect Theory, Balance of Threat, and US Alliance Strategies," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 2 (January 27, 2011): 227–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066110377124>.

<sup>23</sup> Check Mei Ran, *The Grand Strategy of the German Empire: Germany and the Coming of World War I* (Peking University Press, 2016)., & Bangning Zhou, "Explaining China's Intervention in the Korean War in 1950," *Interstate - Journal of International Affairs* 2014/2015, no. 1 (2015), <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1069/explaining-chinas-intervention-in-the-korean-war-in-1950>.

compared to the status quo, then the stronger state is more likely to become entrapped by the weaker state into an unwanted conflict.

Moreover, another scenario that often leads to the entrapment of the stronger power in a bilateral asymmetric alliance by the weaker power occurs when the former has no viable alternative options to turn to for securing its own interests after the weaker alliance member has been defeated. According to Snyder, a state that possesses more attractive alternative options for forming alliances with other states is less dependent on its current ally, as it can conveniently seek resources and support from other sources.<sup>24</sup> The United States during and after the Cold War and Imperial Germany during the Bismarckian era serve as exemplary cases in this regard. Both states were able to easily find alternative alliances to compensate for the loss of their weaker partners in the alliance, thus minimizing their concern about the defection of the latter when a conflict was provoked. Conversely, if for various reasons, the stronger power is deprived of the option of seeking alternative partners to compensate for its losses after losing the weaker partner, both parties in the asymmetric alliance become highly dependent on one another. As a result, the loss of the weaker partner evolves into an unacceptable outcome, and the stronger power becomes ensnared in the conflict. In such scenarios, it becomes rational for the stronger power to defend its weaker ally, as its own security is intrinsically linked to the fate of its ally.<sup>25</sup>

In both historical cases of Germany during the July Crisis and China prior to the Korean War, the stronger states in the asymmetric alliances were unable to turn to other powers to redeem their losses from losing their weaker partners. Germany had already deteriorated its relations with other great powers, such as France, Russia, and Britain, due to its aggressive foreign policy before the crisis.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, China, due to its ideological adversary, was unable to seek help from Western Europe. Moreover, the assistance that the Socialist Camps or neutral states were able to offer could not compensate for the losses incurred by losing North Korea, which led them to be entrapped by the weaker partners.

H2: The likelihood of the stronger power in an asymmetric alliance being entrapped by the weaker power is higher when the former has no viable alternative options to replace the security benefits of the weaker ally after its loss, and both states are highly dependent on each other for security.

In the subsequent section, this paper will conduct a detailed examination of the comparative historical cases of Germany during the July Crisis and China prior to the Korean War in order to scrutinize the validity of the aforementioned hypotheses. By utilizing these two cases, the present study aims to explicate the underlying logic of how the stronger power in a bilateral asymmetric alliance is entrapped by the weaker member. Through this analysis, the theoretical framework proposed in this paper will be reinforced and its explanatory power will be enhanced.

Contrary to the conventional approach of juxtaposing one successful and one unsuccessful entrapment case for comparison, this study carves a distinct path by concentrating solely on successful entrapments. While an unsuccessful entrapment case could

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<sup>24</sup> Snyder, chapter 6

<sup>25</sup> IBID.

<sup>26</sup> Check René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (New York, Harper And Row, 1973).

offer valuable contrast, it is the belief of this research that a deeper dive into the intricacies and ramifications of successful entrapments can yield more meaningful insights. By examining two successful instances, the study can draw comparisons and contrast between them, identifying the common factors that led to entrapment and any unique conditions that might differentiate the two scenarios. This approach facilitates a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the specific circumstances and mechanisms that can lead to successful entrapments. As a result, the insights garnered from this dual-case exploration contribute to a more nuanced understanding of potential entrapment scenarios, enhancing the capacity to foresee and mitigate such risks in the complex domain of international relations.

## Case Studies

The article strategically selects Germany during the July Crisis and China prior to the outbreak of the Korean War as comparative cases to meticulously examine the underlying logic that can lead stronger states to be entrapped by weaker states into unwanted conflicts. These cases possess several compelling factors that make them well-suited for investigating the phenomenon of entrapment. Firstly, both the Germany-Austria-Hungary alliance and the China-North Korea alliance exemplify the characteristics of asymmetric bilateral alliances, precisely aligning with the specific alliance type under scrutiny in this study. The Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary, established in 1879, explicitly outlined mutual military assistance obligations in the face of a war with Russia, fully satisfying the established criteria for an alliance.<sup>27</sup> Supported by the National Material Capabilities measure from the Correlates of War,<sup>28</sup> it becomes evident that Germany held a material capability index of 0.158 in 1914 during the July Crisis, whereas Austria-Hungary's index stood at a comparatively inferior 0.068, which is less than half of Germany's index. These substantial disparities in capabilities convincingly demonstrate the asymmetry inherent within their bilateral alliance.

Similarly, although China and North Korea did not enter into a formal written agreement prior to the Korean War, they forged an informal accord and established a military alliance to fortify their respective national security interests during the conflict.<sup>29</sup> Such arrangements effectively meet the definition of an alliance as posited by Weitsman.<sup>30</sup> Delving deeper into the National Material Capabilities measure, it reveals that China held an index measure of 0.118, whereas North Korea's measure was an exceedingly modest 0.0026 in 1950. These pronounced discrepancies in capabilities further underscore the asymmetric nature of their bilateral alliance. Therefore, both cases epitomize the required qualifications for comprehensive examination within the context of this paper.

<sup>27</sup> A J P Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe : 1848-1918* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1987), Chapter 22.

<sup>28</sup> A dataset from the Correlates of War incorporates a measurement of a nation's power, consisting of six indicators: military expenditure, military personnel, energy consumption, iron and steel production, urban population, and total population. These indicators are utilized to construct the widely used Composite Indicator of National Capability (CINC), which serves as the foundation for assessing national capability. Spanning the period from 1816 to 2016, this dataset provides valuable insights into the dynamics of national power and capability. Clear detail please check the COW's website:  
<https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities/>

<sup>29</sup> Zhihua Shen, "An Analysis of the Sino-North Korean Alliance Relationship during the Korean War 试论朝鲜战争期间的中朝同盟关系," *History Research and Teaching*, no. 2012/1 (2012).

<sup>30</sup> Patricia A Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances : Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 34.

Moreover, both cases provide compelling evidence that corroborates the two hypotheses outlined in the previous section. This section will delve deeper into the historical details to substantiate these hypotheses. Importantly, the comprehensive examination of these historical cases has yielded a wealth of diverse historical documents that lend credibility and accuracy to the information presented.

This section will be divided into different subsections. Firstly, it will provide a brief introduction to the historical background of the July Crisis and the Korean War. Following this, it will explore the relevant historical information from both cases that correspond to the first and second hypotheses, respectively.

### **The July Crisis**

The July Crisis, which occurred in 1914, was a diplomatic crisis among the great powers of Europe. It eventually led to the outbreak of World War I as the great powers failed to effectively address the crisis. The crisis originated with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the potential successor to the Austrian-Hungarian throne, by a terrorist in the capital of Bosnia, Sarajevo. Although the Serbian government had privately warned Vienna about the potential risk of an attack on Ferdinand during his visit, the assassination came as a shock to nearly all the great powers. Austria-Hungary garnered considerable sympathy from foreign nations in the aftermath of the assassination.<sup>31</sup>

After Austria-Hungary received notice of this message, the government was incensed by the assassination. Prior to this incident, Vienna had already harbored profound conflicts with Serbia, owing to the Balkan regional disputes, and sought to erase the country from the map. Upon the arrest of the assassin, an interrogation was promptly conducted, and the investigation indicated that the assassin and his accomplices had executed the terrorist act without any assistance from the Serbian government. However, on account of entrenched historical conflicts and suspicions, Austria-Hungary refused to accept these findings and continued to attribute the murder to Serbia and its leaders. Austrian investigators produced evidence suggesting that some members of the group had received training from the Serbian government. Simultaneously, militarists within Austria-Hungary, such as the Chief of General Staff Conrad, perceived the incident as an opportunity to invade and annex Serbia. However, to garner greater legitimacy for military actions, Vienna deemed it essential to issue an ultimatum containing unacceptable demands to Serbia. By doing so, they anticipated that once Belgrade rejected the ultimatum, they could proceed with military action with a veneer of moral high ground.<sup>32</sup>

Initially, Austria-Hungary's plans received support from Germany, as Germany believed that the conflict would remain localized between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. Germany considered the possibility of Russian military involvement to be minimal, with Kaiser Wilhelm II believing that Czar Nicholas II, as a proponent of monarchy, would sympathize with the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand and therefore disregard Austria-Hungary's aggression toward Serbia.<sup>33</sup> As a result, Germany offered the

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher M Clark, *The Sleepwalkers : How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), Chapter 12.

<sup>32</sup> Sidney Bradshaw Fay, *The Origins of the World War* (The Commercial Press, 1959).

<sup>33</sup> Clark, Chapter 12

now-infamous "blank check" to Vienna, granting it *carte blanche* in its actions against Serbia. However, Berlin maintained that Austria-Hungary needed to act expeditiously while global public opinion remained sympathetic to the demise of Archduke Ferdinand.<sup>34</sup>

Four weeks after the assassination, Austria-Hungary delivered an ultimatum to the Serbian government in Belgrade, mandating a response within 48 hours, failing which Vienna would declare war and mobilize its troops. Unexpectedly, despite Austria-Hungary's stringent demands, the Serbian government acquiesced to most of the terms. Although a few demands were not wholly embraced, Serbia employed decidedly conciliatory language in its response to the ultimatum. However, as Austria-Hungary's ulterior motive was the subjugation of Serbia, Vienna declared war and set its troops in motion after the emperor was swayed by counsel from his advisors. Once Russia discerned that Austria-Hungary might engage in military actions detrimental to Serbia's sovereignty, St. Petersburg initiated partial mobilization in defiance of Austria-Hungary's belligerent scheme and in defense of its ally.<sup>35</sup>

Germany, upon becoming cognizant of Russia's mobilization, was taken aback by the military maneuver. It understood that Austria-Hungary would be ill-equipped to triumph in a war on two fronts against both Russia and Serbia. Particularly, given the alliance agreement between France and Russia, there was a high probability of France becoming embroiled in the conflict as well. In an effort to forestall the loss of its solitary ally, Germany issued a warning to Russia to cease mobilization; otherwise, Germany would be compelled to mobilize in preparation for a large-scale war.<sup>36</sup> During this juncture, Germany did exhibit an inclination toward peace. When Britain proffered the "Halt-in-Belgrade" proposal - which called for Austria-Hungary to occupy Belgrade but refrain from advancing further - Germany was amenable to accepting it. Germany's acceptance was motivated by its desire to keep Britain neutral and avert a major war.<sup>37</sup>

However, when Russia escalated from partial to general mobilization, the plan unraveled. Obligated to safeguard Austria-Hungary pursuant to their alliance agreement, Germany commenced its own mobilization. Ultimately, when Germany executed a military strategy that involved passing through Belgium, Britain perceived its vital national interests as being infringed upon and thus elected to align itself with Russia and France against Germany and Austria-Hungary. As a result, the July Crisis precipitated World War I.<sup>38</sup>

### Germany's Reluctance to be Entangled: The Initial Stance

Contrary to certain traditional perspectives that assert Imperial Germany deliberately sought to instigate a world war with the aim of achieving hegemony through conflict, there is an abundance of evidence to suggest that Germany was not eager to become embroiled in a war from the outset. Some scholars posit that Germany intentionally initiated World War I. One of the most prominent among them is Fischer, who argued that Germany's political and

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<sup>34</sup> A J P Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe : 1848-1918* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1987), Chapter 22.

<sup>35</sup> T G Otte, *July Crisis* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), Chapter 2-5.

<sup>36</sup> Sidney Bradshaw Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, vol. 2 (The Commercial Press, 1959).

<sup>37</sup> Jack S. Levy, "Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in July 1914," *International Security* 15, no. 3 (1990): 175-78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538910>.

<sup>38</sup> A J P Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe : 1848-1918* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1987), Chapter 22.

military leaders harbored long-standing expansionist ambitions and viewed the conflict as an opportunity to realize them.<sup>39</sup> Other scholars, like Stephen Van Evera, contend that deeply entrenched beliefs in the advantages of offense and the benefits of early mobilization for a swift victory propelled Germany into the war.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, in Lieber's recent research on World War I, he asserted that German leaders entered the war with their eyes open, cognizant of the likely protracted and bloody nature of the conflict. He argued that they neither misjudged the nature of modern military technology nor acted out of fear of Germany's adversaries making the first move.<sup>41</sup>

However, the arguments presented by these scholars do not provide conclusive evidence that Germany intentionally engaged in World War I. Firstly, though they cite historical evidence to support the notion that Germany was aware of the potential length of the war or harbored ambitions for hegemony, their arguments lack solid evidence that Germany deemed 1914 to be the optimal moment to provoke a large-scale conflict. Secondly, while they might identify certain officials who supported the idea of Germany engaging in a major war, as Lieber did with Kopke, there is also evidence that significant figures within the German government were opposed to or fearful of Germany being dragged into war. For instance, Chancellor Bethmann expressed concern mere months before World War I that a prolonged conflict could lead to the overthrow of Germany's existing regime.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, in 1909, the retired General Schlieffen expressed apprehensions that a drawn-out war of attrition could give rise to a communist revolution in Germany.<sup>43</sup> These pieces of evidence present contrasting views to those of scholars like Fischer and Lieber and indicate a more nuanced picture of Germany's intentions and concerns at the time.

In addition, other historical evidences showed that even before the July Crisis, in the years leading up to 1914, Germany had repeatedly cautioned Austria-Hungary against initiating any aggressive policies or actions in the Balkan region so as to avert an intense conflict between the Central Powers and the Entente. Indeed, a mere two days before the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, certain officials within the Austro-Hungarian government had intimated to Berlin the necessity for Austria-Hungary to execute a "final liquidation" by launching a strike against Serbia to safeguard its security and interests. Yet, upon being apprised of this proposal, Heinrich von Tschirschky, who was then serving as the German ambassador in Vienna, sternly admonished Austria-Hungary against plotting any radical actions in the Balkans. He emphasized that Vienna needed to take into account not only its own interests but also the perspectives of its ally and the broader European continent.<sup>44</sup>

Kaiser Wilhelm II similarly manifested a distinct aversion to becoming embroiled in the conflict between Serbia and Austria-Hungary prior to the assassination. Wilhelm was of the opinion that Austria-Hungary was exceedingly hypersensitive to perceived threats from

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<sup>39</sup> Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (1961; repr., New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Check Stephen Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War," *International Security* 9, no. 1 (1984): 58–107, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538636>.

<sup>41</sup> Keir A. Lieber, "The New History of World War I and What It Means for International Relations Theory," *International Security* 32, no. 2 (October 2007): 155–91, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2007.32.2.155>.

<sup>42</sup> C J Bartlett, *Peace, War, and the European Powers, 1814-1914* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1996), 177.

<sup>43</sup> Macgregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 105–9.

<sup>44</sup> Fay, 168

Serbia, and he harbored a preference for Austria-Hungary to pursue a peaceful resolution with Serbia to address their deep-rooted disputes. Even during the Balkan Wars, when Austria-Hungary endeavored to establish Albania as a buffer state to preclude Serbian access to the Adriatic Sea, Wilhelm exhibited greater sympathy toward Serbia. He considered Vienna's scheme to be untenable and believed it could potentially precipitate a war between Germans and Slavs, a prospect that deeply disheartened him.<sup>45</sup>

When the assassination had indeed occurred, Germany initially maintained a cautious stance. For instance, the German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, advocated for de-escalation in the Balkans in response to the turmoil in Sarajevo. Heinrich von Tschirschky mirrored this sentiment, urging both Austria-Hungary and Germany to proceed with circumspection. He anticipated affirmation from Kaiser Wilhelm II and Bethmann-Hollweg to respond in a composed yet emphatic and grave manner, while issuing admonitions to Vienna against any precipitate actions.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Kaiser Wilhelm II did undergo a recalibration of his stance to ultimately support Austria-Hungary in its expeditious subjugation of Serbia. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note that this realignment was contingent upon his conjecture that Russia's entanglement in the conflict would be negligible, predicated on the Czar's predilection for the monarchy.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, high-ranking officials within the German military apparatus articulated distinct unpreparedness for engagement in a global conflict and harbored a strong preference for Austria-Hungary to confine the hostilities to the Balkan region.<sup>48</sup>

Even when Russia commenced partial mobilization, Germany persisted in seeking negotiations and endeavored assiduously to avert military conflict between the Central Powers and the Entente. During the July Crisis, Wilhelm II frequently exchanged telegrams with Nicholas II, the Russian Czar, owing to their personal connection, and emphasized the pursuit of a peaceful resolution. Upon Russia initiating partial mobilization, Wilhelm dispatched a telegram to Czar Nicholas II, asserting that if Russia could refrain from escalating to general mobilization and halt military measures deemed threatening to Austria-Hungary and Germany, European peace could still be preserved.<sup>49</sup>

This diplomatic disposition was also evident when the United Kingdom introduced the Halt-in-Belgrade proposal. Kaiser Wilhelm II had consistently aspired to bolster diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom and harbored the belief that even in the event of war, maintaining the UK's neutrality was of paramount importance. Therefore, when Wilhelm perceived that the UK might remain neutral provided that French sovereignty was not compromised by German forces, and in light of the Halt-in-Belgrade proposal, he was inclined to accept the proposal and urged Vienna to acquiesce to mediation. His motivation was predicated on a reluctance to antagonize the United Kingdom and to be heedlessly ensnared in a global conflagration by Vienna.<sup>50</sup> It was not until Russia transitioned to general mobilization that Germany felt compelled to support Austria-Hungary, lest it loses its sole significant ally, as Austria-Hungary was ill-equipped to triumph in a war on two fronts. Thus,

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<sup>45</sup> Fay, 175

<sup>46</sup> Sean Mcmeekin, *July 1914 : Countdown to War* (New York: Basic Books, A Member Of The Perseus Books Group, 2014), chapter 4.

<sup>47</sup> Levy, 159-160

<sup>48</sup> Mei, 773

<sup>49</sup> Mcmeekin, Chapter 21

<sup>50</sup> Levy, 165

Germany ultimately found itself inexorably drawn into the war.<sup>51</sup> All of this historical information collectively substantiates the notion that Germany, in its initial stance, did not anticipate becoming ensnared in the conflict, and was, in fact, actively endeavoring to preserve peace during the crisis. This stands in stark contrast to the assertions made by certain scholars who posit that the war was intentionally orchestrated by Germany.

### Imperative of Engagement: Germany's Calculus in the Face of Austria-Hungary's Potential Demise

As postulated in Hypothesis 1, one of the most salient factors that ultimately precipitated Germany's entry into the war was its assessment that the defeat of its more fragile ally, Austria-Hungary, would result in a subsequent security environment decidedly less favorable than the status quo. Therefore, Germany opted for the high-risk course of action in an attempt to stave off this deterioration in security. Indeed, the historical evidence delineated in the preceding section lends credence to various facets of this hypothesis. Germany extended support to Austria-Hungary in its confrontation with Serbia by granting *carte blanche*, albeit with the expectation that the conflict would remain localized within the Balkans and that Austria-Hungary would swiftly secure victory over Serbia. Nonetheless, as Russia became embroiled in the conflict, Germany, cognizant of the fact that Austria-Hungary would be untenable without its support, felt compelled to partake in military action to bolster its ally.

Indeed, numerous scholars have posited that the imperative to support Austria-Hungary was one of the most critical factors that led to Germany becoming embroiled in World War I. A prominent instance can be found in Scott Sagan's article, "1914 Revisited: Allies, Offense, and Instability." Sagan postulates that Germany's entry into the war stemmed from the necessity of adopting an offensive strategy to safeguard its ally, Austria-Hungary. He asserts that Germany could not countenance the prospect of its ally being subjected to annihilation under Russian supremacy, thus compelling Germany to mobilize.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, Paul Schroeder echoes a similar sentiment, articulating that the Entente's antagonistic policies and actions towards Austria-Hungary were disrupting the balance of power on the European continent. This engendered a perception within Germany that the survival and security of Austria-Hungary were in jeopardy, leading Germany to contemplate the inevitability of adopting risk-laden measures to arrest this decline. The July Crisis served to markedly exacerbate this sentiment.<sup>53</sup>

It is noteworthy, however, that while scholars have acknowledged the unwillingness of Germany to accept the debilitating losses suffered by Austria-Hungary as a factor that precipitated its entry into the war, there is a paucity of in-depth exploration into Germany's rationale, specifically addressing why and how the loss of a relatively weaker ally would adversely impact the security status quo. These elements warrant a more granular examination and will be comprehensively explored in the ensuing discussion.

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<sup>51</sup> James Joll and Gordon Martel, *The Origins of the First World War* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2021), 420.

<sup>52</sup> Scott D. Sagan, "1914 Revisited: Allies, Offense, and Instability," *International Security* 11, no. 2 (1986): 165, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538961>.

<sup>53</sup> Paul W Schroeder et al., *Systems, Stability, and Statecraft : Essays on the International History of Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 181.

There are several pessimistic assessments that led Germany to recognize that certain factors would weaken its security environment if it were to lose Austria-Hungary, its sole ally, due to a lack of military support. Initially, Germany surmised that if Austria-Hungary were to be vanquished by the Entente and subsequently dissolved, Germany would be relegated to a more precarious situation. Prior to the July Crisis, Germany had already been compromising its relationships with other great powers, with the exception of Austria-Hungary. Both states were markedly isolated in the international sphere. In the event of Germany losing its only ally, its security environment would become further isolated, rendering the encirclement of the Entente around Germany increasingly formidable. Concurrently, Germany estimated that Russia's military capacity was burgeoning at an alarming rate compared to its own and that Russia's military strength might surpass that of Germany within a few years.<sup>54</sup> Thus, despite Austria-Hungary's fragility and its frequent succumbing to domestic turmoil, Germany still deemed it imperative to preserve Austria-Hungary in order to counterbalance Russia through additional support. Whether Austria-Hungary was annexed and partitioned by the Entente or abandoned Germany after its defeat, Germany's national security could be imperiled by the Entente powers in the future.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, though Germany harbored a strained relationship with Russia following Bismarck's removal, it remained resolute in its attempts to ameliorate its relationship with Russia to bolster its security environment.<sup>56</sup> As Bismarck had achieved through the formation of the League of the Three Emperors in 1873, Austria-Hungary could always serve as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Russia, since Russia harbored deep-seated conflicts with Austria-Hungary in the Balkan region. Assisting in curbing Austria-Hungary's aspirations in the Balkans could always serve as a strategic ploy to sway Russia to Germany's side.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, without an alliance with Austria-Hungary, Russia would wield greater bargaining power over Germany in future negotiations, even if there were no military confrontations after the Entente defeated Austria-Hungary. Though there might have been potential for Germany to still align itself with Russia, Berlin would have had to make greater concessions to secure Russia's partnership. Even more, if Russia elected to strengthen its ties to the Entente, particularly France, after the defeat of Austria-Hungary, then even if a war was not fought in 1914, Germany might still have been compelled to engage in a cataclysmic conflict with the Entente in the future, albeit with significantly diminished advantages.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, the disintegration of Austria-Hungary could have had adverse repercussions on the sustainability of the monarchy in Germany.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the 1848 revolution, which swept across Europe, evoked apprehension among European monarchs regarding the potential collapse of their respective monarchies and the subsequent loss of dominion within their countries. Germany was not exempt from the influence of this revolution; certain revolutionary factions demanded the abdication of the King of Prussia and sought the establishment of a republic. Although Prussia managed to quell the unrest by adopting a constitutional monarchy and conceding voting rights to its citizens, German monarchs remained perpetually wary of the erosion of their authority. The downfall of a

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<sup>54</sup> Mei, 763-764

<sup>55</sup> Mei, 346

<sup>56</sup> After Wilhelm II succeeded Bismarck and elected not to renew the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia, the relationship between Germany and Russia progressively deteriorated. Nonetheless, Germany persisted in its efforts to ameliorate relations with Russia. For instance, following the Russo-Japanese War, Germany endeavored to forge an alliance treaty with Russia, but this overture was ultimately rebuffed.

<sup>57</sup> William Leonard Langer, *European Alliance and Alignments, 1871-1890* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), Chapter 2.

<sup>58</sup> Mei, 345-346

<sup>59</sup> IBID.

neighboring monarchy could have conceivably destabilized the domestic political landscape in Germany, thereby undermining its security.<sup>60</sup> This notion is exemplified by Kaiser Wilhelm II's initial assessment that Russia would refrain from entering the conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, as he presumed that the Czar was similarly committed to the preservation of monarchical institutions (it is noteworthy that the Czar privately expressed his condolences over the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand).<sup>61</sup>

Ultimately, the forfeiture of Austria-Hungary, by not supporting its sole ally, would have jeopardized Germany's interests and security in the Near East.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, concomitant with Germany's rapid industrialization, from the late 19th century onwards, there was an expansion of German economic interests in the Near Eastern region, most notably through strengthened cooperation with the Ottoman Empire. This cooperation was manifest in Germany's assistance to the Ottoman Empire in reforming its military system and constructing the Baghdad Railway.<sup>63</sup> As such, it was imperative for Germany to maintain stability in the Near East, both to bolster prosperity and to establish a secure environment conducive to economic development. However, owing to geographical constraints, Germany required Austria-Hungary's collaboration to ensure stability in the Balkans, as it could not attain this objective singlehandedly. This necessitated negotiations between Germany and Austria-Hungary aimed at preserving regional order and peace during the Balkan Wars, given Austria-Hungary's deep-rooted involvement in the region.<sup>64</sup> Should Austria-Hungary have become destabilized or aligned itself with the Entente, Germany's ability to safeguard its regional interests in the Near East would have been severely curtailed. Consequently, it was imperative for Germany to uphold the sovereignty of Austria-Hungary to ensure continued support, even if this meant engaging in the war by adopting precarious measures.

In summation, the factors elucidated above demonstrate that the loss of Austria-Hungary would have rendered Germany's security environment considerably more precarious than the status quo. These are significant factors, albeit not exhaustive, that impelled Germany to become embroiled in World War I, despite its initial reticence to be ensnared in such a conflict.

### Indispensable Alliance: Germany's Entanglement in War Due to Lack of Alternatives for Security Redemption

As posited by the second hypothesis, another factor that ensnared Germany in World War I, attributable to Austria-Hungary, was Berlin's lack of alternative options for forging alliances with other great powers to compensate for the security losses it would incur from the potential collapse of Austria-Hungary. Indeed, prior to the July Crisis, Germany endeavored to ameliorate its relations with the United Kingdom, Russia, and France, in pursuit of a more fortified security environment and a return to the diplomatic dexterity reminiscent of the Bismarck era. However, due to entrenched structural conflicts with these great powers, Germany did not succeed in forging alliances as an alternative to its bilateral, asymmetric alliance with Austria-Hungary. While Germany did maintain amicable relations

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<sup>60</sup> René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (New York, Harper And Row, 1973), Chapter 3.

<sup>61</sup> Clark, Chapter 12

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, 569-570

<sup>63</sup> R J Crampton, *The Hollow Detente : Anglo-German Relations in the Balkans, 1911-1914* (London: G. Prior ; Atlantic Highlands, N.J, 1979), chapter 2.

<sup>64</sup> Crampton, chapter 4-6

with minor powers such as the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria, their limited national capacities could not offset the security needs that would arise from the loss of Austria-Hungary. Had Germany succeeded in establishing alliances with either the United Kingdom, France, or Russia, it could have mitigated security threats from other great powers, even in the absence of Austria-Hungary. The subsequent section elucidates the factors that impeded Germany's efforts to cultivate relations with these great powers.

### *France*

Compared to other great powers, France represented the most significant security concern for Germany, particularly since the Franco-Prussian War. The occupation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany following France's defeat instilled a perpetual apprehension within Berlin regarding the possibility of French revenge. As a result, Germany's primary diplomatic objective was to isolate France by forging alliances with other great powers. This imperative led to the formation of the League of the Three Emperors with Russia and Austria-Hungary and also prompted Germany to encourage Italy to align with the UK, thereby excluding France.<sup>65</sup>

Notwithstanding the above, there were instances where Germany endeavored to ameliorate relations with France, particularly during periods when it sought to counterbalance pressures arising from the naval arms race with the UK. For instance, during the conflict between the UK and France over Egypt, Germany elected to support France. Additionally, as France expanded its colonial foothold in North Africa and other regions beyond Europe with the aim of counterbalancing the UK's colonial dominance, Germany perceived an opportunity for diplomatic engagement.<sup>66</sup>

However, the prospects of improving relations with France were significantly undermined by the First and Second Moroccan Crises. Disgruntled by French privileges in Morocco, and aiming to drive a wedge between France and the UK, Germany resorted to military posturing in an attempt to coerce France into retreating during both crises. Though Germany secured certain concessions from France, the diplomatic relations between the two nations deteriorated further.<sup>67</sup> Coupled with deeply entrenched structural and historical tensions, the possibility of forging an alliance with France to safeguard Germany's security environment, especially in the context of potentially losing Austria-Hungary, became increasingly untenable.

### *Russia*

Germany ought to have cultivated a favorable diplomatic relationship with Russia, as both states shared similar political institutions, and there was a close personal rapport between Wilhelm II and Nicholas II. Indeed, prior to Bismarck's replacement by Wilhelm II, the two states largely maintained stable relations despite occasional diplomatic skirmishes.<sup>68</sup> In addition to Austria-Hungary, Russia wielded substantial influence in the Balkans and the Near East and could have served as a viable alternative ally for Germany in the event of Austria-Hungary's collapse. However, various factors rendered this option untenable.

Initially, it is essential to recognize that Germany's economic interests in the Balkans were burgeoning in tandem with its industrialization, which inevitably led to increased

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<sup>65</sup> Mei, Chapter 4

<sup>66</sup> Langer, Chapter 7-8

<sup>67</sup> Sidney Bradshaw Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, vol. 1 (The Commercial Press, 1959), 133–47, 219–31.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, Chapter 10&12

competition with Russia, given the latter's deep-rooted involvement in the Balkans. For instance, Russia expressed reservations concerning the Baghdad Railway when Germany was formulating plans for the project.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, the Bosnian Crisis of 1909 significantly strained relations between Russia and Germany. During this crisis, Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia unilaterally, which enraged Serbia due to its extensive ties with Bosnia and its ambitions to expand its influence in the Balkans. As an ally of Serbia, Russia chose to support Serbia in its opposition to Austria-Hungary's actions. However, Germany allied itself with Austria-Hungary and used military threats to coerce Russia into acquiescence. As a result, Russia was forced to back down and recognize Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia. This turn of events was a diplomatic victory for Germany, but it was a humiliating defeat for Russia and bred deep-seated resentment. Germany had hoped to drive a wedge between Russia and other Entente powers through its coercive strategy, but this tactic backfired on Germany. The prospects of forging an alliance with Russia were irrevocably damaged, at least for several years following 1909.<sup>70</sup> The combination of competing interests in the Balkans and the exacerbation of tensions during the Bosnian Crisis rendered the formation of an alliance between Germany and Russia implausible.

### *The United Kingdom*

Compared to France and Russia, the United Kingdom was ostensibly the great power with which Germany had the greatest opportunity to either improve relations or, at the very least, maintain neutrality. The geographical position of the United Kingdom rendered it less inclined to deeply intervene in European affairs. Additionally, prior to the 20th century, the UK had experienced conflicts with France over colonial activity in Egypt, and with Russia over interests in the Far East and Central Asia.<sup>71</sup> Had Germany successfully formed an alliance or maintained neutrality with the UK, it could have wielded sufficient power to counterbalance threats from France and Russia. This is especially pertinent given that the maintenance of a balance of power and the integrity of great powers were always integral to the UK's foreign policy.

However, any potential for improved relations was shattered when Germany engaged in a naval arms race with the UK. The United Kingdom had always considered naval supremacy and commercial security over sea routes to be of paramount importance, as evidenced by the Naval Defence Act passed by the UK parliament, which stipulated that the strength of the British navy should surpass the combined might of the world's second and third most powerful navies. Nonetheless, this supremacy was put in jeopardy when beginning in 1898, Germany passed the German Naval Laws. This was driven by Kaiser Wilhelm II's aspirations for colonial acquisitions, an expansion of Germany's economic and commercial interests, and a desire to build a stronger navy that could exert pressure on Britain to adopt a more accommodating policy towards Germany.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Taylor, 457-458

<sup>70</sup> Sidney Bradshaw Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, vol. 1 (The Commercial Press, 1959), 306-321

<sup>71</sup> René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (New York, Harper And Row, 1973), 214-222,

<sup>72</sup> Lianqing Fang, Binyuan Wang, and Jinzhi Liu, *History of International Relations (Modern Volume)*, vol. 2 (BEIJING BOOK CO. INC., 2006), 514-17.

The acceleration of Germany's naval construction naturally elicited perceptions of threat from the UK, which in turn, not only motivated the UK to hasten its construction of battleships but also rapidly deteriorated diplomatic relations between the two nations. The Anglo-German naval arms race was a significant factor in the UK's gradual gravitation toward diplomatic cooperation with France and Russia. Although the UK endeavored to ameliorate tensions with Germany by proposing agreements to halt the naval arms race, Germany consistently proffered demands that were untenable for the UK. Ultimately, the naval arms race inflicted severe damage on the diplomatic relations between the two countries, and Germany squandered a crucial opportunity to secure an alternative ally, which would have bolstered its security in the aftermath of the loss of Austria-Hungary.<sup>73</sup>

In conclusion, the absence of an alternative option for forming an alliance to compensate for the loss of security owing to the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian alliance was another factor that contributed to Germany's entrapment in World War I. Indeed, apart from the deep-rooted historical issues with France, Germany had the opportunity to maintain and enhance its diplomatic relations with either Russia or Britain through the extension of certain concessions. However, Germany's aggressive foreign policy ultimately severed relations with these two potential allies and propelled them to align with its adversaries. This chain of events ultimately led Germany down the path to a cataclysmic war that could have potentially been averted.

### **The Korean War**

The Korean War commenced on June 25, 1950, when North Korean forces, aided by the Soviet Union, crossed the 38th parallel with the intention of unifying the peninsula. The conflict concluded on July 27, 1953, when U.S. Army General William Harrison and North Korean General Nam Il signed 18 copies of the Korean Armistice Agreement in three languages. The genesis of the war can be traced back to the conclusion of World War II. Following Japan's surrender, American military officials delineated U.S. and Soviet occupation zones in Korea along the 38th parallel, with the U.S. zone encompassing approximately two-thirds of the total Korean population.<sup>74</sup>

The United States propped up a conservative government in the south, which was helmed by Syngman Rhee, an alumnus of Princeton University. This government was predominantly constituted of affluent landowners, some of whom had collaborated with the Japanese government during World War II. Conversely, in the north, the Soviet Union bolstered a leftist communist regime led by the fervent communist Kim Il-Sung. The leadership of both regimes harbored ambitions to expediently unify Korea under their respective banners.<sup>75</sup>

In the south, the United States harbored reservations regarding Rhee's aspirations, fearing that they could ensnare U.S. forces in a protracted conflict. Furthermore, Korea was not perceived as being of paramount importance in the context of the U.S. grand strategy. As a result, the United States withdrew its troops from South Korea in 1949 and omitted the

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<sup>73</sup> René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (New York, Harper And Row, 1973), 226-231

<sup>74</sup> Zhihua Shen, *Cold War in Asia: The Korean War and China's Military Intervention in Korea /Leng Zhan Zai Ya Zhou : Chaoxian Zhan Zheng Yu Zhongguo Chu Bing Chaoxian* (Beijing : Jiu Zhou Chu Ban She, 2013), 1-10.

<sup>75</sup> IBID.

country from its defensive perimeter, as articulated by Secretary of State Dean Acheson in a speech the following year. In the north, however, Kim's ambitions were not similarly curtailed by the Soviet Union and China. Initially, both Stalin and Mao were reticent to endorse a military incursion by North Korea, as they were apprehensive that it could provoke the ire of the United States. Additionally, China had only recently emerged from its own civil war. Nonetheless, Kim was disenchanted with the decisions of the Soviets and the Chinese and consequently implored the Soviet ambassador to facilitate a meeting with Stalin. After several entreaties, Kim succeeded in swaying Stalin to assent to North Korea initiating a military offensive. Under the duress of Stalin's insistence, Mao reluctantly acquiesced to this decision.<sup>76</sup>

On June 25, 1950, Kim Il-Sung deployed a force of approximately one hundred thousand troops, heavily armed, to invade South Korea. Concurrently, the Truman administration perceived Kim's offensive as an element of Stalin's strategy for global hegemony and surmised that a failure to defend South Korea would undermine the United States' credibility among its allies. To counter the North Korean incursion, the U.S. government expeditiously deployed forces stationed in Japan to the Korean theater of war. Owing to the lack of preparedness of the U.S. troops, American and South Korean forces were compelled to retreat to the Pusan perimeter. It was not until General MacArthur executed an audacious strategy — an amphibious assault at the port of Inchon — that the pressure on Pusan was alleviated, and North Korean forces were ultimately repelled. The North Korean troops were swiftly pushed back to the 38th parallel.<sup>77</sup>

At this juncture, had U.S. forces elected to halt their advance at the 38th parallel, the ensuing armed conflict with China might have been averted. Evidenced by a telegram from Mao Zedong in September, the Chinese government had indicated that, provided North Korean forces could retain the 38th parallel, China would be content to let North Korea wage the war independently. However, the rapid successes achieved by MacArthur engendered overconfidence. Disregarding Chinese admonitions against crossing the 38th parallel, MacArthur proceeded to advance American troops toward the Yalu River. Following repeated warnings from China against violating the 38th parallel, Mao Zedong resolved to deploy Chinese forces to Korea on October 8, 1950. Six months thereafter, subsequent to a succession of defeats suffered by MacArthur, U.S. forces were once again pushed back to the 38th parallel. Subsequent to MacArthur's replacement by General Ridgway, the conflict between China and the United States devolved into a protracted and bloody stalemate that persisted until the armistice agreement was signed in 1953.<sup>78</sup>

### China's Reluctance to be Entrapped: The Initial Stance

<sup>76</sup> Zhihua Shen, *Cold War in Asia: The Korean War and China's Military Intervention in Korea /Leng Zhan Zai Ya Zhou : Chaoxian Zhan Zheng Yu Zhongguo Chu Bing Chaoxian* (Beijing : Jiu Zhou Chu Ban She, 2013), 11-18

<sup>77</sup> Zhihua Shen, "How Did the United States Get Involved in the Korean War? 美国是怎样卷入朝鲜战争的," *World History(Shijielishi)*, no. 3 (1995), [https://chn.oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFD9495&filename=HIST503\\_012&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=-Ar2iobujUfPbBO4uzWPPpqNSaBzpZCrIS6kQqcUd6Cuq3kddSJnjxg58p toJt](https://chn.oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFD9495&filename=HIST503_012&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=-Ar2iobujUfPbBO4uzWPPpqNSaBzpZCrIS6kQqcUd6Cuq3kddSJnjxg58p toJt).

<sup>78</sup> Bangning Zhou, "Explaining China's Intervention in the Korean War in 1950," *Interstate - Journal of International Affairs* 2014/2015, no. 1 (2015), <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1069/explaining-chinas-intervention-in-the-korean-war-in-1950>.

Analogous to Germany's initial posture during the July Crisis, China was decidedly averse to engaging in the Korean War before the deep involvement of the U.S.. It was only the crossing of the 38th parallel by U.S. forces, which led China to the pessimistic conclusion that such a development could detrimentally affect its security environment, that precipitated its involvement. Notably, at the time when Kim Il-Sung sought Mao Zedong's support for assisting North Korea in unifying the Korean Peninsula, China had recently emerged from the Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War, both of which had wreaked economic devastation. The nation grappled with surging inflation and an escalating unemployment rate. According to estimates from the Chinese government, agricultural production had plummeted by 40 percent compared to pre-Civil War levels, while major industrial output had declined by over 50 percent.<sup>79</sup> The principal transportation systems were in ruins, and to exacerbate matters, floods ravaged various regions of China. In the aftermath of the conflict, approximately seven million refugees were in dire need of sustenance and assistance. Moreover, owing to Western-imposed blockades, even Shanghai, the industrial epicenter of China, witnessed a staggering loss of employment; over 120,000 laborers were rendered jobless within a span of three months. Consequently, Mao explicitly communicated to Stalin and Kim that China could ill-afford direct involvement in the Korean War due to its precarious economic condition, which threatened to further destabilize the country.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned concerns, China was hesitant to engage in the conflict as it surmised that the prevailing political situation was not conducive to North Korea's ambitions. China deemed it imprudent for Kim Il-Sung to aggressively pursue the unification of the Korean Peninsula in the short term, chiefly because the nascent communist regime in North Korea had yet to achieve stability and consolidate its power base. Moreover, China, grappling with its own set of post-war challenges and economic tribulations, was in a precarious position where it could not provide substantial support. The country was still in the process of rebuilding and addressing a plethora of domestic upheavals and socio-economic issues.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, Mao Zedong harbored significant apprehensions regarding the geopolitical ramifications of North Korea's actions. He was acutely cognizant of the fragile security situation in East Asia and was wary that an aggressive bid to unify the Korean Peninsula might serve as a catalyst for intervention from the United States and Japan. Such intervention could not only jeopardize the security environment in the region but also have far-reaching implications for China's own strategic interests. Considering the intricacies of international politics and the delicate balance of power, Mao believed it was essential for North Korea to exercise restraint and focus on internal consolidation. The diplomatic landscape at the time necessitated prudence and a measured approach, rather than hasty military endeavors that could draw in major powers and destabilize an already tense region. In Mao's calculus, the long-term viability and security of the communist states in East Asia were to be prioritized over immediate territorial ambitions.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Bangning Zhou, "Explaining China's Intervention in the Korean War in 1950," *Interstate - Journal of International Affairs* 2014/2015, no. 1 (2015), <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1069/explaining-chinas-intervention-in-the-korean-war-in-1950>.

<sup>80</sup> Zhihua Shen, *Mao Zedong, Stalin, and the Korean War* 毛泽东, 斯大林与朝鲜战争 (Guangdong: Guangdong People's Publishing House, 2003), 161–62.

<sup>81</sup> Zhihua Shen, *Cold War in Asia: The Korean War and China's Military Intervention in Korea* /Leng Zhan Zai Ya Zhou : Chaoxian Zhan Zheng Yu Zhongguo Chu Bing Chaoxian (Beijing : Jiu Zhou Chu Ban She, 2013), 122-123

<sup>82</sup> Shen, 123

Even as the United States commenced its landing at Inchon, the majority of members in the Chinese Politburo, which constituted the highest echelon of authority within the Chinese government, remained vehemently opposed to direct engagement in the Korean War. A consensus emerged among the officials, who posited that China should refrain from entangling itself in additional conflicts until its domestic situation stabilized and ongoing land reforms were brought to fruition. Notably, the vast disparity between the United States air and naval forces and those of China was a critical concern. Moreover, a palpable sense of war-weariness pervaded the ranks of the Chinese military, which had been embroiled in incessant conflict.<sup>83</sup>

Even Lin Biao, one of Mao Zedong's most trusted senior military officials, articulated his opposition to Chinese involvement in the Korean War. Lin contended that the potential costs of engagement, both in terms of hindering domestic development and potentially provoking extensive U.S. bombing campaigns against China, were too great. There was also the looming specter of the United States employing nuclear weapons to decimate major Chinese cities, a prospect that General MacArthur indeed considered. Lin Biao, advocating a more cautious approach, proposed that even if the decision were made to deploy troops to North Korea, they should refrain from direct confrontation with U.S. forces.<sup>84</sup>

This collective caution underscored the deep reluctance within the Chinese government to become entrapped in the Korean War. However, the strategic calculus underwent a swift transformation when the United States, disregarding China's admonitions, crossed the 38th parallel. This development precipitated a reevaluation of China's stance and necessitated a response to counter what was perceived as a grave threat to regional security and Chinese interests.

#### Imperatives for Intervention: China's Strategic Necessity to Preserve North Korea

China's calculus and initial reluctance to engage in the Korean War underwent a precipitous shift following the United States crossing of the 38th parallel, in spite of China's repeated warnings against such a move. The advance of U.S. forces coupled with the inability of North Korean forces to mount an effective resistance led the Chinese government to the stark realization that the very survival of the communist regime on the Korean Peninsula was in jeopardy. Stalin even intimated to China the need to prepare for Kim Il-Sung's establishment of a government-in-exile within Chinese territory.<sup>85</sup> However, Mao recognized the critical importance of preserving North Korea as a buffer state to forestall the encroachment of U.S. forces on China's borders. The collapse of North Korea would pave the way for the deployment of U.S. troops adjacent to China, irrevocably altering the security landscape to China's detriment. Such a scenario would render China's security environment markedly inferior compared to the status quo. These mounting concerns ultimately impelled Beijing to make the formidable decision to deploy Chinese troops to directly counter U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula.

Initially, in Mao's assessment, the United States harbored not only the intention to dismantle the North Korean regime but also the ambition to invade Chinese territory with the objective of establishing a pro-U.S. government, using the Korean Peninsula as a

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<sup>83</sup> Shen, 134

<sup>84</sup> Shen, 135

<sup>85</sup> Xu Yan, *The First Confrontation: A Historical Review and Reflection on the Korean War* 第一次较量 (Beijing: China Radio and Television Press, 1998), 22.

springboard. Mao remained vigilant regarding U.S. actions in East Asia, surmising that once the United States subdued North Korea, it would persist in extending its sphere of influence into Chinese territory. Even if the United States were to momentarily suspend its military aggression, Mao anticipated that Washington would, sooner or later, either instigate a conflict or cultivate conditions conducive to exerting diplomatic pressure that would jeopardize China's domestic stability.<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, Mao emphasized that if the U.S. were able to station its troops in proximity to the Chinese border, the bulk of China's defense forces would be encumbered by the strain of countering U.S. military pressure. This perspective was also shared by Zhou Enlai, one of China's most influential politicians, who asserted that if North Korea were occupied by the United States, China would be hard-pressed to muster sufficient forces to secure the thousands of kilometers of border adjacent to the Korean Peninsula, thereby exacerbating the financial strain associated with safeguarding an increasingly precarious security environment.<sup>87</sup> Concurrently, the Kuomintang persisted in its ambitions to reunify with the mainland. Particularly in light of the United States continued deployment of the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing harbored deep-seated concerns that committing substantial forces to the border near the Korean Peninsula would attenuate its presence in the Taiwan Strait. This, in turn, could potentially create favorable conditions for the Kuomintang and the United States to orchestrate an invasion of China via the sea.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, it was imperative for China to bolster the survival of North Korea as a means to preserve and potentially enhance its security environment.

In addition, Mao contended that allowing North Korea to be vanquished by the United States without intervention would condemn China to an increasingly isolated security environment in the future. After China's decisive alignment with the socialist bloc led by the Soviet Union, it experienced a natural deterioration in diplomatic relations with the United States and its allies, as they were adversaries of the socialist camp. Nonetheless, within the socialist bloc, China continued to face diplomatic pressures during the Korean War. Stalin harbored reservations regarding the Chinese Communist Party, suspecting it of being more of a nationalist entity than a genuine proponent of Marxist-Leninist ideology. His suspicions were further fueled by Tito's deviation, which was perceived as a betrayal of the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union. Ultimately, Stalin posited that China needed to demonstrate its allegiance to the socialist camp by providing direct military assistance to North Korea. This, in his view, would serve as proof that China was committed to upholding Marxism-Leninism and fortifying global communism rather than pursuing narrow nationalist interests.<sup>89</sup>

The Eastern European socialist states echoed these sentiments. The prevailing public opinion of the time anticipated that China should deploy its troops to the Korean Peninsula to safeguard the North Korean regime by confronting the U.S. forces.<sup>90</sup> In order to forestall

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<sup>86</sup> Zhihua Shen, *Cold War in Asia: The Korean War and China's Military Intervention in Korea* /Leng Zhan Zai Ya Zhou : Chaoxian Zhan Zheng Yu Zhongguo Chu Bing Chaoxian (Beijing : Jiu Zhou Chu Ban She, 2013), 141

<sup>87</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace: The Lessons of Mao's Korean War Telegrams," *International Security* 17, no. 1 (1992): 153, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539160>.

<sup>88</sup> Bangning Zhou, "Explaining China's Intervention in the Korean War in 1950," *Interstate - Journal of International Affairs* 2014/2015, no. 1 (2015), <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1069/explaining-chinas-intervention-in-the-korean-war-in-1950>.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas J Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith : Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 20–21.

<sup>90</sup> Shen, 131

further suspicions from Stalin, who might construe China's inaction as indicative of a nationalist orientation, and to avert an increasingly isolated security environment in the future, Mao deemed it imperative to dispatch Chinese troops to North Korea to counteract this trajectory.<sup>91</sup>

Lastly, Mao harbored apprehensions regarding the possibility that if the United States occupied North Korea and proceeded to breach the Chinese border, the Soviet Union might seize this opportunity to deploy its troops in China's northeastern region, with no intention of withdrawal. Mao's concerns were rooted in historical precedent, as Russia had previously occupied Chinese territories. Furthermore, Stalin had coerced Chiang Kai-shek into signing an agreement that permitted the Soviet Union to occupy Dalian and Lushun under the pretext of defending against a Japanese invasion.<sup>92</sup> Mao was acutely aware of the possibility of history repeating itself if the United States were to advance its forces to the Chinese border. Even though China and the Soviet Union were allies, Mao remained skeptical, fearing that the presence of Soviet troops within China could jeopardize its sovereignty and security. Therefore, to preclude such an outcome, Mao deemed it necessary to defend North Korea's independence by establishing it as a buffer state through Chinese military intervention, rather than remaining passive and risking a potentially detrimental outcome.<sup>93</sup>

In summary, the aforementioned concerns elucidate why China found itself ensnared in a conflict for which there was initially widespread opposition among Chinese officials. Recognizing that the loss of North Korea would exacerbate its security environment beyond the status quo, China deemed it imperative to defend North Korea's existence as a buffer state, thus safeguarding its own security interests.

### Inadequate Compensation for China's Security Losses Without North Korea

China could not obtain adequate alternative options to safeguard its security interests in the event of losing North Korea, which consequently dragged it into the Korean War. Just prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, China had established formal diplomatic relations with only a handful of states outside the Socialist Camp led by the Soviet Union. These states, such as India, generally maintained a neutral stance but lacked the power and influence necessary to assist China in securing its security environment in the absence of North Korea as a buffer. Although China had forged an alliance with the Soviet Union, deep-seated historical suspicions made China wary of the Soviet Union's assistance, particularly in the form of troop deployment along the Chinese border. Additionally, economic aid or limited military support could not offset the potential threat of a U.S. invasion.

Regarding the capitalist bloc, the majority of the states harbored strong reservations about China due to ideological differences. Moreover, with the exception of the United States, most of the other great powers were still recuperating from World War II and were either unwilling or incapable of accommodating China's security needs.<sup>94</sup> In theory, if the

<sup>91</sup> Zhihua Shen, *Cold War in Asia: The Korean War and China's Military Intervention in Korea* /Leng Zhan Zai Ya Zhou : Chaoxian Zhan Zheng Yu Zhongguo Chu Bing Chaoxian (Beijing : Jiu Zhou Chu Ban She, 2013), 131

<sup>92</sup> Shen, 133-134

<sup>93</sup> IBID.

<sup>94</sup> According to the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) from the Correlates of War (COW) project, in 1950, within the capitalist bloc, France and the UK were the most capable in terms of national power, with the exception of the United States. However, France's CINC index stood at a mere 0.033, while the UK's was at

U.S. and China could have reconciled their differences and reached a security assurance agreement, China's concerns about its security environment might have been alleviated. However, historical factors and mutual distrust precluded such an outcome. This section will delve into why neither the Soviet Union nor the United States could serve as viable alternatives for China to safeguard its security interests following the potential loss of North Korea.

### *Soviet Union*

As one of the two superpowers emerging post-World War II, the Soviet Union was a force that possessed the capacity to safeguard China's security interests in the event of North Korea's collapse under American aggression. This included securing China's borders against potential invasions from the United States. Given that both states had signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, it seemed plausible for China to seek security assistance from the Soviet Union in the wake of losing North Korea. However, the treaty permitted the Soviet Union to deploy its troops within Chinese territory. While this could have been an effective deterrent against an American invasion, as the United States was not keen on direct confrontation with Soviet forces, historical conflicts between Russia and China made this option unpalatable for the Chinese leadership. Specifically, Mao harbored reservations due to the Soviet Union's past occupations in China's Northeast region and was wary that the Soviets might seek a permanent presence within Chinese borders, thereby exacerbating sovereignty issues.<sup>95</sup>

Another alternative for China to safeguard its security interests following the loss of North Korea was to procure advanced armaments from the Soviet Union, thereby bolstering border defenses against potential American invasions. Indeed, China sought the Soviet Union's assistance in acquiring 100-200 fighter jets and 40-80 bombers, as well as in training 1000 pilots and 300 airfield personnel to build up the Chinese air force. China also requested the Soviet Union's aid in establishing advanced naval capabilities. However, Stalin rejected these proposals due to concerns that China might employ these assets in offensive campaigns, such as an attack on Taiwan.<sup>96</sup> Had the Soviet Union acceded to these requests and supplied the requisite armaments, China might have felt more secure in its ability to defend its interests and mitigate the security role that North Korea played. Then, China might not have been compelled to become entangled in the Korean War

### *The United States*

As the most direct threat to China, a reconciliation and security reassurance between China and the United States could have potentially prevented China from engaging in the Korean War. However, mutual suspicion rendered such an option untenable. Notably, around the time the People's Republic of China was established, there were efforts from both sides aimed at forging formal diplomatic relations. The United States harbored hopes that the communist regime in China might follow Tito's precedent in Yugoslavia by maintaining an

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0.061. Even when combined, their national power did not equate to China's index of 0.118, and lagged significantly behind that of the United States, which stood at 0.284. Consequently, they were not capable to provide substantial assistance.

<sup>95</sup> Zhihua Shen, *Cold War in Asia: The Korean War and China's Military Intervention in Korea /Leng Zhan Zai Ya Zhou : Chaoxian Zhan Zheng Yu Zhongguo Chu Bing Chaoxian* (Beijing : Jiu Zhou Chu Ban She, 2013), 131

<sup>96</sup> Zhihua Shen, *Mao Zedong, Stalin, and the Korean War* 毛泽东, 斯大林与朝鲜战争 (Guangdong: Guangdong People's Publishing House, 2003), 97.

independent foreign policy, free from Soviet control, and sustaining amicable relations with the capitalist bloc. This, in turn, could have allowed the United States to retain its interests in China as it did during the Kuomintang period.<sup>97</sup> However, this aspiration proved to be illusory.

Although China was open to establishing diplomatic relations with the United States, it stipulated that the U.S. government needed to recognize the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate government and cease supporting the Kuomintang regime in Taiwan. Such demands were not palatable to Washington. President Truman, striving to implement a pragmatic policy aimed at mobilizing domestic resources to contain China, invoked the rationale of countering the spread of communist tyranny to garner legitimacy from the American populace. Any concession to the communist regime would have been construed as weakness, and seen as compromising American strategic interests.<sup>98</sup> This impasse consequently dashed any prospects of establishing diplomatic relations between China and the United States. Moreover, in 1950, when China signed the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union and adopted the foreign policy of "Leaning to one side," the United States perceived the likelihood of China emulating Yugoslavia's independent stance as increasingly remote, thus exacerbating tensions between the two nations.<sup>99</sup>

From the Chinese perspective, Mao harbored deep-seated suspicions towards the United States and was convinced that the U.S.'s ultimate objective was to subvert China's communist regime. The United States' refusal to abandon Taiwan and establish diplomatic relations with China only intensified Mao's distrust.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the Soviet Union, taking into account Tito's precedent, was deeply concerned that Mao might adopt a nationalist stance akin to Tito's, rather than adhering to Marxist internationalism under Soviet leadership. Consequently, Moscow exerted substantial pressure on Mao to prevent any rapprochement with the United States. Mao, in turn, chose to align unequivocally with the Soviet Union, adopting a more hostile stance towards the United States.<sup>101</sup> Thus, the mutual suspicion and deepening hostility between China and the United States rendered reconciliation and accommodation untenable. As a consequence, with no viable alternatives to secure its interests, China found itself with little choice but to fight for North Korea's independence as a means of safeguarding its own security.

In conclusion, the absence of viable alternatives from other states to compensate for China's security interests following the potential loss of North Korea also emerges as a significant factor that drew China into the Korean War. With regard to the Soviet Union, had it been willing to provide ample arms support to China to defend against a potential American invasion, China might have reconciled with the loss of North Korea, focusing instead on utilizing such armaments to secure its own territories. Alternatively, had the United States been amenable to reconciliation and provided security assurances, China might have abstained from engaging in the conflict. However, deep-seated mutual suspicions and intensifying rivalries between the two states precluded such an alternative.

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<sup>97</sup> Zhou Duo, "Will the United States Lose China Again?," *The Wall Street Journal Chinese Edition*, May 27, 2014, <https://cn.wsj.com/articles/CN-OPN-20140526095253>.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas J Christensen, *Useful Adversaries : Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), chapter 1.

<sup>99</sup> Christensen, chapter 5

<sup>100</sup> IBID.

<sup>101</sup> IBID.

## Conclusion

This paper conducts a thorough examination of the factors that could cause the stronger state in a bilateral asymmetric alliance to be entrapped by its weaker ally. The paper posits two scenarios under which the stronger power might find itself embroiled in an unwanted conflict, despite its initial reluctance to engage.

The first scenario is grounded in prospect theory. It suggests that when the stronger state perceives that the defeat of its weaker ally would result in a future security environment inferior to the status quo, it becomes more likely to be entrapped in an unwanted conflict. The stronger state might engage in military intervention as an attempt to preserve the current security environment. The second scenario posits that entrapment is more likely when the stronger state lacks alternative avenues for forming agreements with other states to offset the loss of its weaker ally. This may occur if the two states in the alliance are highly dependent on each other for security benefits.

Also, The paper employs comparative case studies involving Germany during the July Crisis and China prior to the Korean War to illustrate these hypotheses. In both cases, Germany and China were highly reluctant to be drawn into conflicts initiated by Austria-Hungary and North Korea respectively. Nevertheless, after assessing the potential detrimental impact on their security environments and recognizing the lack of alternative diplomatic options, both countries felt compelled to fight for the survival of their weaker allies.

Furthermore, this paper contributes to the academic literature by addressing a gap in the study of alliance management. It challenges the prevailing view among scholars, which holds that the stronger state in a bilateral alliance is unlikely to be entrapped by the weaker state due to its greater leverage and resources. In doing so, this paper sheds light on an underexplored anomaly within alliance politics. Furthermore, this analysis holds significant policy implications. History has shown that when a great power is entrapped in a conflict, the results can be catastrophic, as seen in the cases discussed, where numerous soldiers and civilians lost their lives in conflicts that could potentially have been avoided. To prevent such scenarios, states must be cautious in their dealings with the weaker allies of stronger powers. This can be achieved through ensuring adequate security assurances for the stronger power. For instance, states could send strong public signals to both domestic and international audiences that they have no intention of initiating any form of conflict with the stronger power, or they could enter into arms control agreements that limit offensive weaponry, thus reducing the perceived threat and significantly mitigating the risk of entrapment.

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