FLIPS AND FLOPS: ALLIANCE DEFECTION IN GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Gabriel Max Scheinmann, M.A.

Thesis Advisor: David M. Edelstein, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Why do states sometimes betray their allies and “flip” to a rival state? Great powers compete not only directly, but also for the allegiances of other states. As evidenced by Italy’s betrayal of its Germanic allies during World War I or the American leveraging of the Sino-Soviet split during the Cold War, driving and exploiting divisions in a hostile alliance can have a momentous impact on the balance of power. If the advent of the nuclear age has made great power conflict a more costly and thus a less attractive means for achieving international goals, the realignment of one country’s disposition away from a rival can reap major benefits at both lower risk and substantially reduced cost. The dominant theories in the alliance literature suggest that alliance fluctuations are functions of threat perception. This dissertation suggests that external threats may motivate a state to shift alliances, but that threat alone cannot explain what enables a state to exit its current alliance and enter a new one. My research demonstrates that states flip when two specific variables are aligned: the state’s political regime is strongly cohesive and its existing alliance is weakly cohesive. Strong regime cohesion enables the state to flip alliances without domestic repercussions while weak alliance cohesion erases any institutional shackles that would maintain the alliance beyond the interests it served. Derived from an original database of alignment flips, I conduct four detailed case studies of prominent 20th century alliance flips. Given the challengers to the current vast
American alliance system, alignment flips are likely to be an even more attractive proposition for American competitors in the years to come.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing any dissertation involves traveling a long road. My road was long, winding, and unanticipated. As an undergraduate, I relished the idea of one day perhaps undertaking such a project, but I never thought it would happen in the way it did, at the place it did, at the time it did. Looking back on these last few years, I can only say how glad I am that I leapt at the opportunity and how rewarding the journey has been. This journey would not have been possible without the guidance, support, assistance, and friendship of so many people.

My first debt of gratitude goes to the man who invited me on this journey and, in doing so, changed the course of my life: Michael Oren. I remember vividly the day in mid-January 2008 when Michael called to tell me he was accepting a teaching offer from Georgetown and wanted me to come study under him. I had been both a student and a research assistant of Michael’s for less than two years and was awed and honored by the opportunity he was offering me. Without hesitation, consideration, or consultation, I said yes and set my course for Washington.

Just as my life took an unexpected turn, so did his. Less than a year into my program, Dr. Oren became Ambassador Oren, the newly appointed Israeli Ambassador to the United States. While our academic relationship would be put on hold and despite being busy with matters of state, Michael ensured that Georgetown’s commitment to me would remain unchanged. As Ambassador, we remained close and, in an unofficial capacity, Michael has remained my adviser in more ways than one. Sally Oren, a remarkable,
marvelous, stoic, and kind woman, welcomed me into her home and family throughout their time in Washington. I will forever be grateful to both Michael and Sally for taking a chance on me and setting my course.

In addition to the Orems, there were a number of people associated with the then-Program now-Center for Jewish Civilization (CJC) who did much to make my arrival and adjustment to Georgetown warm. Bob Burkett ensured that I would continue to be employed even after the sudden change in my adviser. Jacques Berlinerblau, the Center’s director, and Melissa Weinberg Spence welcomed me with open arms and involved me in a myriad of programs and responsibilities that showed their confidence in me. In particular, I truly enjoyed my collaboration with Sarah Feinberg.

Next, I owe the deepest of debt to my committee—David Edelstein, Michael Green, and Victor Cha—for shepherding me through this entire process under their esteemed aegis. Their diverse expertise and approaches contributed immeasurably to my thinking, framing, and development of my topic, hypotheses, and cases. Their comments, both throughout the process and during the defense, have improved the manuscript incalculably. I can only hope that this work lives up to the quality of their scholarship.

I am especially appreciative of the guidance and dedication of my chair, David Edelstein. David is a phenomenal teacher, which I knew from first-hand experience as a student in his international security seminar. He is clear, discerning, thoughtful, and intellectual honest. David always answered all my questions, gave me timely and insightful
comments on all my drafts, and spent considerable time simply brainstorming and
gaming out the logics of my project. His questions and comments regularly cut to the
heart of my work, helping streamline my muddled explanations and challenge my
simplistic analyses. Under David’s guidance, I was able to craft a project that was both
academically rigorous and policy relevant. It is an understatement to say that David was
essential to the completion of this endeavor.

While also serving as a member of my committee, Mike Green has been so much more
since the day I walked into his classroom my first semester. Since I arrived at
Georgetown, it is difficult to think of an individual who shaped my intellectual
development, my career, and my perspective more than Mike. Mike took a flyer on me as
a research assistant on a subject which I had no expertise simply because I had dared to
openly, and likely naively, question some conventional wisdom in his class. After five
years as his research assistant and eight years later, Mike’s magnum opus, By More Than
Providence, will be the tome of reference for all students of Asia strategy for decades to
come. I feel honored to have played a role in the project, but even more honored to have
learned so much about Asia, history, strategy, Washington, and academia from Mike.

I would also like to thank the various institutions and organizations that have funded my
doctorate. I owe Georgetown University, in particular the Graduate School of Arts and
Sciences and the Government Department, an enormous debt of gratitude for providing
me with tuition scholarships and gainful employment throughout my years in the
program. In particular, thank you to Justin Harried and Paula Evans for steering me
through all the administrative hoops. Through its Graduate Fellows Program, the
Rumsfeld Foundation provided me with several years of grant funding that allowed me to
conduct research I would not have otherwise been capable of. I feel privileged to be part
of a growing network of scholars committed to public service and appreciate the
inspiration, time, and support Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his team have dedicated to
this program.

I also owe a special tribute to my employers, who supported me throughout the writing
process. Matt Brooks and Shoshana Bryen of the Jewish Policy Center gave me the time,
space, and encouragement needed to work on my dissertation while fulfilling my other
responsibilities. Even as I interviewed for my current position, the Board of Directors of
The Alexander Hamilton Society understood my commitment to this dissertation and
endorsed my work even as I took over the organization. I would especially like to thank
Roger Hertog for his constant encouragement and Roy Katzovicz for his enthusiastic
reassurance.

Bob Lieber deserves a special mention for he was, perhaps unknowingly, the hidden hand
that connects all these strands. He was instrumental in facilitating my arrival at
Georgetown, played a critical role in weaving me into the CJC family, supported me
within the Government Department, connected me to the Rumsfeld Foundation, and
introduced me, at an earlier stage, to The Alexander Hamilton Society. Needless to say,
Bob has been present at every step and I cannot thank him enough.
Throughout this odyssey, I could not have asked for a better cohort of companions and co-conspirators in Raphael Cohen, Rebecca Gibbons, and Rafael Frankel. Forged in the fires of statistics problem sets, their collectiveness willingness to help each other advance together set the tone for our program. Intellectually heterodox yet cheerfully cohesive, Rafi, Rebecca, and Rafi were my anchors, giving me just enough slack to ride the waves but not too much to keep me from becoming unmoored. They saw many iterations of this project (and of previous ones) and provided patient, necessary, and good-natured feedback. Scholars in their own right, they will remain lifelong friends.

Finally, I am most thankful for the love and support of my family. Unquestionably encouraging, my sisters, Clara and Emma, kept me on my toes. They were never afraid to ask me why I had not completed my next chapter whenever I hectored each of them about their respective work. My parents, Michel and Brigitte, threw themselves behind me from day one and, in many ways, grasped the magnitude of both the task and the accomplishment more than I ever did. They were patient and impatient at all the appropriate moments, pushing me in different ways to cross the finish line before life became even busier than it already was. Their unhesitating support and unwavering optimism succored me until the end.

And then there is my wife and love, Michelle. When we first met, I was in doctoral limbo—a.k.a. ABD—and struggling to identify a worthy puzzle. Yet, despite her having a real job with real hours, in sharp contrast to my existence, she was always supportive, preferring kind encouragement and endless faith in my abilities as her bedrock role in this
project. She remained remarkably patient with both my progress and my epically long explanations of whatever aspect of my work that was troubling me that day. Whenever new and sparkling opportunities presented themselves, she explored them with me, but always returned to that enduring dictum: get the dissertation done. Finally, when our lives were on the precipice of transformation, she still managed to read and copy-edit this entire manuscript, immeasurably improving it for both my sanity and the reader’s. Her imprints on this, and on me, are self-evident. I am speechlessly grateful for everything she has done for me.

To Jacob, our son, who, one day, will realize that he is the reason this dissertation was completed.

Gabriel Max Scheinmann
Washington, D.C.
April 24, 2017
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Chapter One: Definitions, Data, and Theory

Why do states sometimes betray their allies and “flip” to the opposing side? Why are alliance defections so rare when their benefits are so substantial? States that jump ship are seldom studied outside of their specific historical contexts. While the general alliance literature is quite rich, alignment flips lack both a settled term as well as an organized theory for why they occur.

Why Does Flipping Matter?

Alliance flips are especially potent geopolitical phenomena in the modern international system. The advent of the nuclear age has made traditional interstate war more costly and thus a less attractive means for achieving international goals. Consequently, a realignment of one country’s disposition away from a rival can reap major benefits at both lower risk and substantially reduced cost. For instance, the Cold War can be viewed as a geopolitical competition over the allegiances of smaller states. The United States and the Soviet Union rarely confronted each other directly, but wrestled, in various ways, over the fealties of nearly all other states. It was a flipping competition par excellence, played across several continents.

The post-Cold War international order, with its vast American alliance system, makes alignment flips an even more attractive proposition for American competitors. Largely unable to accost the United States directly, would-be rivals have taken to driving wedges between America and its allies. By one count, the United States is treaty-bound to defend sixty-nine countries, making up seventy-five percent of global economic output
and twenty-five percent of the global population.¹ Russian and Chinese undertakings to pry away American allies are evident throughout Europe and Asia. As a relatively low-cost, potentially high-reward endeavor, flipping may become even more prevalent in an age when alliances seem to matter even more than war.

When states do flip, the results are typically dramatic. Thucydides recounts how the First Peloponnesian War (460-445 BCE) was prompted by the Athenian-led defection of Megara, on the Isthmus of Corinth, from the Spartan-dominated Peloponnesian League.² During the War of the League of Cambrai from 1508-1516, first France flipped sides, from supporting the Papacy to allying with Venice, and then Venice switched sides in 1513, agreeing to France’s offer to partition Lombardy between them.³ A century and a half later, King Louis XIV of France similarly offered rewards to a number of other European powers during the Dutch War (1672-1679), successfully flipping Great Britain, Sweden, Rhine League, and even Leopold I.

Modern examples of successful flipping are also rare, but emblematic of the high-reward nature of the enterprise. Under French and British prodding, Italy and Romania abandoned the Triple Alliance in favor of the Triple Entente in the early stages of World War I, changing the scope of the battle. After the war, the United States managed to split apart the two-decade Anglo-Japanese alliance, bringing the United Kingdom to its side in the Pacific. As an overture to World War II, Hitler temporarily pried the Soviet Union out

of its traditional alliance with France, thus securing his eastern front while he invaded the Low Countries and France itself. Each of these flips had a dramatic impact on the balance of power and transformed the course of major international developments.

The Cold War also featured several high-profile flips, as the superpowers tussled for the allegiances of other states. Historian Margaret McMillan aptly dubbed Richard Nixon’s 1972 visit to China “The Week That Changed the World,” for the trip transformed China from an American adversary to an ally and, with it, the Cold War. Similarly, the flip of Egypt, from a Soviet ally and leader of the Arab Bloc to an American and Israeli partner, through the Camp David Accords and subsequent Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, ended an era of interstate Arab-Israeli wars. Even within the Communist camp, Moscow and Beijing vied for the loyalty of Albania, which flipped back and forth between the two. More recently, the United States and Israel tried to split Syria from its alliance with Iran to no avail. Russia’s limited invasions of both Georgia and Ukraine can be seen as part of a broader Russian-American competition to pull those countries into each other’s orbit.

While alliance defections are as old as alliances themselves, the terminology and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon is relatively cluttered. This chapter will first define what is an alliance flip. After reviewing the various existing bodies of relevant alliance formation literature, I will then present my own theory of flipping, including hypotheses and expected observable implications. Finally, the chapter will outline the working universe of cases from which I have selected several in-depth case studies.

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What is a Flip?

In order to determine why some states flip their alignments, one must first define what qualifies as a flip. At its simplest, a flip is a state’s defection from its existing alignment to an opposing one. In his examination of American alignment with Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, Evan Resnick scrutinizes U.S. bargaining behavior with “allies of convenience,” which he defines as “the initiation of security cooperation between two states that are ideological or geopolitical adversaries” in order to balance a mutual and more immediate threat. Daniel Nexon identifies attempts “to convince an actor’s allies (or potential allies) to defect from the cooperative arrangement, remain neutral, or switch allegiances” as a divide-and-balance strategy. While Resnick’s work focuses solely on the management, not the initiation, of a single such alliance and Nexon’s theorizing takes the form of a review essay, both capture the nature of the objectives of flipping.

Attempts to influence antagonistic alliances are thoroughly examined by Timothy Crawford, which he defines as attempts “to prevent, break up, or weaken a threatening or blocking alliance at an acceptable cost.” Within the broader “wedging” universe, Crawford brands the attempt to “shift a target from an opposing alliance to a friendly one” as realignment, the most difficult and the most costly, but potentially the most momentous. As he sweeps through numerous examples, Crawford’s most important contribution is the conclusion that the ways and means by which states approach this endeavor matter. “By manipulating promises and threats, rewards and punishments,”

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8 Crawford, 159.
divider state can alter the alignment behavior of a rival coalition, an implicit rebuke to the traditional balancing expectations of structural realism. Similarly, in *How Enemies Become Friends*, Charles Kupchan examines the process by which former adversaries bury the hatchets and change their stripes.9

A flip, however, is conceptually distinct from Kupchan’s transformations and Crawford’s wedge strategies. Whereas Kupchan describes a process and Crawford delineates methods, a flip is merely the end state, irrespective of its pathway. A transformation can be a flip and a wedge strategy can lead to a flip, but neither are necessary conditions for a flip. Furthermore, a flip is not merely a pole on the wedging spectrum. A successful wedge is not necessarily the first step on the way to a flip. States will seek to usefully manipulate rewards and punishments even when a flip is impossible since the costs to all states involved are substantially lower than a true alliance defection.

Flips include both defections initiated by a divider state and realignments engineered by the flipped state. However, not all flips are created equal. Alliance changes due to regime change or conquest may well be flips, but their causes are neither mysterious, nor necessarily replicable. Several additional restrictive conditions are necessary in order to further delineate the scope of this study.

First, the aforesaid state must be in a self-evident preexisting alignment. While some alignment terms are purposefully kept secret, the alignment itself must be known, or at least assumed, by others. Second, the flip cannot have occurred as a consequence of the demand for unconditional surrender through the use of force, i.e., total war. The American defeat, occupation, and rebuilding of Germany and Japan following the Second

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World War flipped the strategic orientations of both states, but the lessons of regime overthrow, societal reconstruction, and military support are simultaneously self-evident and not germane. However, the use of limited force, whose goal is meant to compel a target state to accede to certain demands, is included in this study. States have historically shelled, bombed, and even engaged in limited territorial occupations in order to enforce a political objective. By placing the cases of externally driven regime change outside the scope of this study, one can create a more accurate picture of what non-extreme flips truly entail.

Third, alignment changes resulting from internal regime change have also been excluded. The causes of flips that occurred following independence, such as in the case of Mali in the 1960s; internal revolution, such as in Libya and Iran in the 1970s; or imperial dissolution, such as a number of former Soviet states in the 1990s, are not obscure. Whether internal or external forces caused the regime change, it is clear that it was the regime change itself that precipitated the change in alignments. Analogous to the previous condition, cases where internal political dynamics forced a change in the existing regime’s position are included, but cases where internal political dynamics forced a change in the regime are not.

Fourth, the flip must result in the establishment of a new alignment between sovereign states. Annexation, colonialism, and conventional imperialism are excluded since those methods result in the loss of political autonomy of at least one member. Similarly, a mere policy shift or cooperation on an exclusive issue would not meet the minimum threshold of an alignment. For example, U.S.-Soviet arms limitation agreements certainly did not presage U.S.-Soviet general alignment.
By narrowing the scope of the examination in order to focus on less evident factors, a revised definition of flipping reads as follows: \textit{a flip is the defection of a sovereign state from its existing alignment to an opposing one without a change in that state’s regime}. By holding the state’s political leadership constant, I am removing a presumably powerful explanation for a state’s alignment change in order to delve deeper into those cases whose geneses are less perceptible.

Unsurprisingly, my universe of cases consists largely of great or regional powers tussling over the defections of smaller states. Although flipping is narrowly about the realignment behavior of states, it is also a means of competition between great or regional powers. By managing to peel away another state from a rival without resorting to war, a state can fundamentally shift the balance of power and improve its geostrategic outlook. Understanding such a phenomenon is especially useful in today’s international system that, in many ways, is undergirded by the U.S.-centric alliance network.

In order to delimit a universe of cases, I must also define “alignment” vs. “alliance” for the purposes of this study. The alliance literature houses a healthy debate, centered mostly on the formality, obligations, and institutionalization of a pact. The Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions Project (ATOP), which I will use as a foundational source for interstate alliances, employs a restrictive definition. An alliance is “a formal agreement among independent states to cooperate militarily in the face of potential or realized military conflict.”\textsuperscript{10} ATOP only includes written agreements that involve “promises to aid a partner in the event of military conflict, to remain neutral in the event of conflict, to refrain from military conflict with one another, or to

consult/cooperate in the event of international crises that create a potential for military
conflict."\(^{11}\)

Although a limiting definition is useful for quantitative studies, alliance scholars
are less confident about the theoretical division between formal and informal alignments.
At first, Glenn Snyder also distinguishes between alliances, “formal associations of states
for the use (or nonuse) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside
their own membership,”\(^{12}\) and alignments, the “expectations of states about whether they
will be supported or opposed by other states in future interaction.”\(^{13}\) In practice, however,
Snyder admits that the “political reality of alliances is not different in kind from that of
tacit or informal alignments; it lies not in the formal contract but in the expectations that
are supported or created.”\(^{14}\) An informal alignment with greater credibility can engender
greater expectations of action than a formal alliance with lesser credibility. Victor Cha
makes a similar point by focusing his definition of alignment on the “expectations states
have regarding the likelihood that they will have another’s support in disputes with
particular adversaries.”\(^{15}\) In *The Origins of Alliances*, Stephen Walt abandons the
distinction all together and uses the two terms interchangeably.\(^{16}\)

For this study, I am most interested in the broader forces at work in flipping
behavior, which entails altering the balance of power by changing an opposing state’s
strategic orientation. As such, I believe that its dynamics are the same whether dealing
with formal or informal alignments. For example, it was not until World War II that the

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\(^{11}\) Leeds et al., 5.
\(^{13}\) Snyder, 6.
\(^{14}\) Snyder, 8-9.
\(^{15}\) Victor D. Cha, “Abandonment, Entrapment, and Neoclassical Realism in Asia: The United States, Japan,
United States and the United Kingdom concluded a series of formal treaties, yet it is evident the two countries had been aligned for several decades. Similarly, today the United States has no formal defense treaties with a number of Middle Eastern states, such as Israel or Saudi Arabia, and yet these are clearly alliances.

Therefore, like Walt, I intend to use the terms “alignment” and “alliance” interchangeably and define both as a security cooperation agreement whereby two or more states pledge to support each other militarily. As Snyder and Cha both explain, it is the “expectations” that make any cooperative agreement real, not the piece of paper upon which it is signed. Therefore, flipping dynamics should apply to all agreements where such expectations of cooperation, typically against a third party, exist. The nature—formality, obligations, and institutionalization—of security obligations could very well impact the likelihood of a flip, but I do not think that adopting a more inclusive definition of alliances will introduce bias in my results.

*Why and How Do States Ally?*

If an alliance flip is the coupling of two acts—a state’s exit from one alliance and entrance into another—then an examination of why and how states enter and exit alliances should provide a good foundation to understanding why and how states flip alliances. The alliance formation literature houses disparate theoretical concepts that are worthy of further inspection.
Structural realists contend that alignment behavior is motivated by a balance-of-power or balance-of-threat logic. Kenneth Waltz observes that states balance against their will and “flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them.” When faced with a threatening power, states will seek to ally with other similarly concerned states in order to gain greater security and reduce the magnitude of the threat. In his examination of alliance formation in the Middle East, Walt argues that aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power capabilities, and aggressive intentions contribute to a state’s perception of threat and combine to galvanize counterbalancing alliances. Without denying the relevant catalyzing role it can play in alliance formation and reformation, power alone is an insufficient explanation for flipping behavior. By including intentions in his formulation of balance of threat theory, Walt himself admits that balancing is at least partly the result of the actions states take, the manner in which they communicate them, and the perceptions they generate. Walt contrasts the countervailing coalition spurred by Hitler’s extraordinarily aggressive ambitions with the lack of balancing against Bismarck’s careful defense of the European status quo, even as both acquired more power. States can either prevent or animate opposing coalitions by nurturing a more positive or negative image of their power and behavior. Moreover, Waltz confesses that diplomatic strategies also play a decisive role in alignment behavior. “Flexibility of alignment,” Waltz writes, “means both that the country one is wooing may prefer another suitor and that one’s present alliance partner may defect.” As a consequence, “a state’s strategy must please a potential or satisfy a

18 Walt, 21-26.
19 Walt, 25.
present partner.”

To draw allies, “suitors alter their appearance and adapt their behavior to increase their eligibility. Those who remain unattractive, finding that they compete poorly, are likely to try all the harder to change their appearance and behavior.”

Even the greatest proponents of balancing understand that alliance shifts are not motivated by power alone.

Like Waltz, Snyder also argues that alliance solicitation, particularly if it leads to a defection, preoccupies all states, especially in a multi-polar system. The existence of alternatives engenders pervasive concerns “about the danger of being abandoned; hence all must take care that the ally does not become disillusioned and restless.”

To discourage potential defections, a state can try to make its policy more suitable to its ally, which perversely can entrap it in unwanted directions and situations. The perpetually shifting abandonment-entrapment dynamic, known as the “alliance security dilemma,” presents incessant opportunities for rival states to engineer flips. The dilemma’s existence means it is impossible for an alliance to achieve pareto optimality. Consequently, flipping opportunities are embedded in every alliance.

**Regime Security**

States indeed form alliances to counteract against threats, but, Steven David contends, those threats are internal as well as external. In his examination of Third World alignment behavior, David argues that states “omnibalance”—they ally with those who will best protect them from all threats, whether internal, external, or both. The regime, not the state, David asserts, is the most powerful determinant of Third World alignment

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20 Waltz, 165.
21 Waltz, 165-166.
22 Snyder, 19.
behavior. Leaders calculate “which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary to keep them in power. This is so because of the unstable, dangerous, and often fatal nature of the international and *domestic* political environment that characterizes the Third World.”

For the most part, David argues, Third World regimes are institutionally weak and politically illegitimate and, therefore, their largest threats come from within. During the Cold War, very few Third World regimes fell as a result of foreign invasions (Pol Pot, Noriega, Idi Amin); most were overthrown from within.

By changing the unit of analysis from the state to the regime, David demonstrates that while leaders may appear to be appeasing certain external threats, they are, in fact, simply more concerned about internal ones. “When a leadership,” David argues, “is confronted with a choice between aligning so as to benefit the state but endangering its hold on power or aligning in such a way that harms the state but preserves its power, it will choose the latter.” According to David, examples of such omnibalancing behavior include Ethiopia’s Mengistu Haile Mariam’s decision to ally with the U.S.S.R. and Egypt’s Anwar Sadat’s decision to ally with the United States. Mengistu and Sadat “flipped” because whereas their old allies were better suited to protect them against external threats, their new allies were more willing to provide them with the necessary security against internal threats, their respective primary concerns.

Building off David’s analysis, Jack Levy and Michael Barnett argue that domestic economic weakness can motivate regimes to seek external alliances. “There is an incentive for political leaders to ally with an economically more powerful state that might

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24 David, 236.
25 David, 243.
26 David, 245-251.
provide scarce resources, which, in turn, might help resolve internal economic and political problems.”

Political threats, the authors argue, are often the outcome of a weak domestic political economy. As Levy and Barnett explain, “because Third World leaders frequently give primacy to domestic interests and threats to those interests, under conditions of particularly severe internal threats they may be willing to enter into international arrangements that leave them worse off relative to other foreign actors but better off relative to domestic actors.” Whatever the motivation, regimes are simply unlikely to risk damaging their rule for the sake of an improved alliance.

**Diplomatic Strategies**

In contrast to the more structural arguments made by traditional alliance theorists, some scholars contend that the strategies chosen by states in order to alter the alignments of enemies are key factors in explaining alliance behavior. It is the way in which states approach their targets, not the underlying balance of power or threat, which determines whether or not a hostile state will jump into a friendly camp. Many such studies concentrate on leader agency, demonstrating the unique impact of a particular individual’s approach such as Bismarck or Kissinger.

In *How Enemies Become Friends*, Kupchan outlines a four-step transformation sequence: unilateral accommodation, reciprocal restraint, societal integration, and the generation of new narratives and identities. States, according to Kupchan, remove a threat by “exercising strategic restraint and making concessions to an adversary” as a way

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28 Levy and Barnett, 32-33.
29 Kupchan, 6.
to signal benign intent. The concession needs to be “unusual and costly,” such as “backing down on a border dispute or unilaterally withdrawing forces from a contested area,” in order to indicate the seriousness of the gesture.\(^{30}\)

Although Kupchan’s story is superficially about strategies, it actually undercutsthe accommodation-based approach he promotes. Transformations, Kupchan writes, can only occur when three conditions exist between the two parties: 1) institutionalized restraint, 2) compatible social orders, and 3) cultural commonality. Each of these conditions are related to the states’ domestic compositions—politically, socially, and culturally—and not to the transformation strategy itself.\(^{31}\) Kupchan is making a hybrid realist-constructivist argument: once a unilateral material concession is made, normative factors determine whether or not a flip occurs.\(^{32}\) As a result, his most successful cases, unsurprisingly, include the Anglo-American rapprochement, the European Union security community, and the Swiss Confederation. Nevertheless, the concept of unilateral accommodation is a useful basis for understanding flipping strategies.

Like Kupchan, Timothy Crawford also posits that a “selective accommodation” strategy can divide opposing coalitions, although he remains sanguine about its chances of engineering a full flip. He outlines three types of selective accommodations that vary according to the cost to the divider state: appeasement, compensation, or endorsement.\(^{33}\) Appeasement, the most costly form, involves surrendering on a direct primary interest, such as territorial concessions. Compensation involves offering inducements from the divider’s secondary interests, such as peripheral territorial, policy, or economic

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\(^{30}\) Kupchan, 38.
\(^{31}\) Kupchan, 6-8.
\(^{32}\) Kupchan, 20.
\(^{33}\) Crawford, 167-175.
adjustments. Lastly, endorsement, the least costly, means supporting a target’s position on a tertiary interest, such as rhetorical support for the target’s policy or in an international institution. For each form of selective accommodation, Crawford differentiates between specific and general linkage; the former is when conditionality is strong and formal, the latter where it is weak and informal.

As part of coaxing cooperative behavior through positive inducements, states can also “bandwagon for profit,” i.e., ally with the more powerful side in order to reap the potential gains, such as war spoils.\(^{34}\) When gains are available, Schweller explains, “there is no reason to expect that states will be threatened or cajoled to climb aboard the bandwagon; they do so willingly.”\(^{35}\) For example, in 1498, Venice, after first forming a balancing alliance against France, flipped to France’s side, “lured by the prospect of gaining more territory on the Italian mainland.”\(^{36}\) Two centuries later, Louis XIV sought to “destroy the Triple Alliance and gather a group of client states round France” in order to isolate Holland. To do so, he essentially offered cash subsidies to England’s Charles II in return for the latter’s breaking of his alliance with the United Provinces. As McKay and Scott conclude, “the English defection effectively dissolved the Triple Alliance.”\(^{37}\) In more recent history, Nazi Germany secured the military cooperation and coordination of both the Soviet Union and Italy by promising both respective shares of the spoils—parts of Poland and the Baltics for Moscow and parts of France for Rome.

\(^{34}\) Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit.”
\(^{35}\) Schweller, 79.
States can also implement coercive strategies in order to achieve an alignment shift. As opposed to the aforementioned logic of enticement, a state could switch sides out of fear, preferring to appease the divider state rather than face military, economic, or diplomatic hardships. For example, Turkey, a neutral power for most of World War II, declared war on Germany and Japan in February 1945 under heavy Allied pressure. Cold War-era concerns about the “domino theory” in Southeast Asia or “Finlandization” in Europe were also manifestations of such logic. More recently, American pressure on Syria in the run-up to the 1991 Gulf War and on Pakistan in the weeks before the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan forced both states to abandon their existing alliances and join the U.S.-led coalitions.

What are the Determinants of a Successful Flip?

 Threats, either internal or external, to regime security are important to understanding why states ally, but are neither singularly determinative of alignment behavior nor of flipping behavior specifically. Proponents of a threats-based understanding of alliances acknowledge that states can react by either balancing or bandwagoning—polar opposite phenomena—and, therefore, such an approach cannot be predictive of whether a state will flip. If a state feels threatened by its current ally, it could flip—balancing—or draw closer—bandwagoning. Whereas balancing predicts states will ally against stronger powers, a stronger power may have greater flipping success because it reassures the smaller state that it will be protected from its spurned ally. Similarly, whereas an overbearing and tight alliance may produce fears of entrapment and consequently expressions of independence, a loose or discordant alliance
might make a flip more feasible precisely because it is not as bound to its alliance partner. In short, the logic underpinning traditional alliance dynamics is conceptually distinct and perhaps counterproductive to understanding how states flip.

Even if certain flips could be classified as balancing, the majority could not. In most flip cases, a state is dissatisfied, but not threatened, by its ally. Moreover, even a satisfied state could flip by bargaining for a different alliance with better terms. As discussed earlier, flip opportunities are embedded in every alliance since every state is constantly seeking to escape the alliance security dilemma. Even a state that is generally satisfied with its security-autonomy equilibrium is looking for ways to increase both its security and its autonomy. While in practice a state cannot simply shop like an individual or a company for a better deal, mere dissatisfaction with its current alliance is not a necessary precondition for flipping. Some flips may be explained by fear and some may be explained by dissatisfaction, but some, theoretically, can be explained by the presence of a better deal. Recent Russian-American competition over the alignment of Central Asian states, particularly Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, are possible illustrations of the latter.38

If flipping dynamics are distinct from general alignment behavior, what are its most powerful determinants? Primed by the alliance formation literature, I have extrapolated four key variables that I believe should have great bearing on flipping: regime cohesion, alliance cohesion, power differential, and flipping strategy. In the

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section below, I will evaluate each of these factors independently in order to assess how applicable and critical they are likely to be.

**Regime Cohesion**

Scholars, such as David as well as Levy and Barnett, have highlighted the domestic factors impacting alliance formation. The ability of a state to diametrically change its geopolitical orientation, i.e., break its commitment to its current ally and even turn against it, is dependent on the internal political constraints faced by the regime. Primarily concerned with its own survival and prosperity, the internal strength and cohesion of the regime will impact its willingness and ability to radically change its external alignment. Whereas a strong and cohesive regime is likely to have greater freedom of maneuver to conduct its foreign policy, a weak and divided regime faces far greater constraints on its external behavior.

Generally, this means that the stronger and more cohesive a regime is, the more likely its alignment decisions will be based on external factors. A cohesive regime is confident that its alignment decisions will not negatively impact its domestic standing and grip on power. Were it to flip, it believes either there would be no domestic opposition or that such opposition could be neutralized effectively.

In contrast, the more dangerous threats to a weak regime are likely internal. Therefore, a weak and divided regime is more likely to base its alignment decisions on the internal, rather than external, threats to its political interests. Generally, anti-regime factions could exploit the jarring nature of an intended external alignment flip to weaken or topple the regime. Concerned first and foremost with threats from within, such a
regime is unlikely to risk undergoing such a fraught alignment transformation that could leave it internally exposed and externally empty-handed.

This leads to my first hypothesis:

**H1A:** Ceteris paribus, a strong and cohesive regime is more capable of flipping alignments.

**H1B:** Ceteris paribus, a weak and divided regime is less capable of flipping alignments.

In some cases, a divided regime could flip in order to appease or outflank a faction or the opposition. A weak regime could increase its chances of survival through external alignments that provide it with the necessary support, both financial and military, to maintain power. As mentioned earlier, David argues that Ethiopia’s Mengistu and Egypt’s Sadat both flipped because their new allies could, respectively, provide them with better security against internal threats. Although it remains a minority scenario, if a state can outmaneuver domestic opposition by flipping, then it may be willing to do so.

Regime cohesion can be measured in several ways. Does the leader effectively control the military and internal security forces? Does the leader have a monopoly on political decision-making? Is the leader concerned about political rivals? Do the critical players inside the regime see eye-to-eye on key issues?

A completely cohesive regime has a monopoly over the use of force. Its leader has complete decision-making autonomy and is unconcerned about political rivals. In a strongly cohesive regime, we can expect to see vast agreement between its leading actors,
fewer machinations for power, as well as longevity and stability. In contrast, a regime that does not control all of the state’s security forces and whose leader is unable to execute its political decisions and is highly concerned about political rivals is not cohesive. In this case, the most potent threat to the regime is actually internal. Manifestations of a brittle regime can include divided allegiances among the security services, fractured bureaucratic or territorial control, institutional inability to execute political decisions, and perhaps even evidence of plots to overthrow the leader.

While it can be difficult to distinguish between the regime and the state in practice, the theoretical distinction is consequential. Throughout this study, I will be examining and tracing this variable through the lens of the political leaders, as opposed to the state bureaucracies and institutions. Were I measuring the strength and cohesion of the state, I would be looking for whether the state is fully sovereign within its borders, whether its institutions are capable, stable, and competent, as well as how prevalent and enforceable is the rule of law, instead of the abovementioned criteria.

In authoritarian states, it can be exceptionally difficult, but not impossible, to separate the two concepts. In two of my case studies (Egypt and China), the regimes even created the state, thus further blurring the lines. The more democratic the polity is, the clearer the distinction becomes. For example, in my examinations of Italy and Great Britain during and after World War I, the cohesiveness of the regimes evolved, but the states remained respectively weak and strong. A cohesive regime is likely also a strong one, but it can remain so independently of the nature of the state. For the purposes of this study, my analytical lens will be the regime.
**Alliance Cohesion**

Alliances, as Snyder notes, are bargains between security and autonomy. Both states cede some political autonomy in return for the increased security the alliance entails. Each state seeks to negotiate the maximum increase to its security for the minimum dilutions of its autonomy. By definition, no alliance represents a seamless or idyllic contract, as each member, if it could, would seek a renegotiation on more advantageous terms. Even among close allies, tensions and disagreements are common and offer potential areas of exploitation for industrious adversaries.

The less satisfied an ally is with its current alliance, the more interested it is in other alignment opportunities. A state can be dissatisfied with the terms of its alliance or disgruntled that its ally is not meeting its expected obligations. In the most common scenario, alliance scholars have identified an “alliance security dilemma,” whereby a state is constantly stuck between the dual fears of abandonment and entrapment. While a deep and growing intra-alliance rift is the optimum scenario, an entrepreneurial state can seek to exploit small differences of opinions into larger ones. If a state comes to believe that it could secure better alliance terms from a different partner, then it is more likely to be willing to flip sides.

This leads to my second hypothesis:

*H2A: Ceteris paribus, a state in a cohesive alliance is less interested in flipping alignments.*

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39 Snyder, 43.
H2B: Ceteris paribus, a state in a brittle alliance is more interested in flipping alignments.

Various scholars have measured alliance cohesion mostly as a function of the distance between allied goals and objectives, especially during war.\(^40\) In examining NATO members’ behavior during the Cold War, Kupchan pinpoints three manifestations of alliance cooperation: 1) joint operations or explicit military assistance, 2) policy compromise, and 3) economic contributions to collective defense.\(^41\) Patricia Weitsman similarly gauges cohesion as functions of coalition warfare: 1) the capacity of member states to coordinate their war-fighting strategy, 2) the ability of states to agree on war aims, and 3) the ability of the alliance to prevent defection before the end of the war.\(^42\) Her definition is similar to those put forward by Ole Holsti, P. Terrence Hopmann, and John Sullivan who define alliance cohesion as the ability of states to agree on goals and strategies toward achieving them.\(^43\)

In contrast, institutionalists, such as Galia Press-Barnathan, argue that “the nature and strength of the pre-existing institutional arrangements within the alliance” and “the degree of power disparities vis-à-vis the powerful ally” best explain alliance cohesion.\(^44\) If institutional “stickiness” is one reason alliances sometimes outlast its members’ shared security interests, ideational factors is another. Although they were generally referring to


\(^{42}\) Weitsman, 85.


the imprint a hegemon can leave on the international system, Ikenberry and Kupchan’s identification of the power of “substantive beliefs,” as opposed to strict material incentives, as a way of shaping behavior, can equally be applied to alliance cohesion.45 Ideology, identity, trade, resource dependence, and political legitimacy all form part of the connective tissue within an alliance. Over time, the *casus foederis* can become divorced from the original material factors and actually override some of the tensions that seek to pull the alliance apart. Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S.-centric alliance system has broadly been maintained at least partly due to a common liberal outlook, the interdependence of defense sectors, and trade links, in spite of tensions over actual threat perceptions. One would expect an alliance between states with a shared ideology or identity or with expansive trade links in key sectors to be one that is, *ceteris paribus*, more cohesive.

Alliance cohesion can thus be measured in several ways. First, how robust are the terms of the alliance? Robust obligations, such as specific, costly, and established military commitments, will make an alliance more cohesive. States that willingly agree to strong terms are more likely to see eye-to-eye with each other on critical matters. All things being equal, the costlier the commitment, the more cohesive the alliance is likely to be. In contrast, weak alliance obligations, such as ambiguous, cheap, and unsettled military commitments, will make the alliance less cohesive. The feeble conditions signify the value the states ascribe to the alliance. An alliance that prescribes joint offensive military action at a specified date, time, and place with an explicit trigger is likely to be

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far more cohesive than one that outlines a general understanding of non-aggression in the case of action by a third-party.

Second, how institutionalized is the alliance? Manifold, rooted, and highly developed alliance institutions, such as formal councils, regular military exercises, and the basing of troops in the partner’s country, are indicative of strong alliance cohesion. Strong institutions not only signal the high value states assign to the alliance, but can also help sustain the alliance even if its underlying rationale has changed. For example, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s extraordinarily mature institutions have extended the life of the alliance despite the Cold War having ended nearly three decades ago. In contrast, limited, weak, and underdeveloped alliance institutions are indicative of weak alliance cohesion. The paucity of strong institutions may not only indicate the lack of worth ascribed to the alliance, but may also mean that nothing is there to keep the alliance together if the initial mutual security interest dissipates.

Third, how strong are the ideational bonds in the alliance? Alliances between states with shared ideological approaches or identities are likely to be more cohesive. Ideational factors can either augment or, in some circumstances, even replace the security-based rationales of most alliances. These bonds can help drive a common purpose, reduce the likelihood of major disagreements, and build trust. Alliances between states with discordant ideologies and dissimilar identities are likely to be less cohesive. Ideational conflicts can impact—even impede—the proper functioning of the alliance.

To summarize, an alliance with robust obligations, with highly developed institutions, and whose members share strong ideational bonds is very cohesive. An alliance with weak terms, few institutional mechanisms, and little ideational convergence
is a very disjointed and un-cohesive alliance. While the former decreases the likelihood of a successful flip, the latter increases them. However, as discussed earlier, even a state in a strongly cohesive alliance can theoretically be flipped if it receives a better alliance offer. In practice, a state cannot easily “alliance shop” and elements that constitute the alliance could prevent it from consummating the flip. Nonetheless, a state in a strongly cohesive alliance is not immune from flipping.

**Power Differential**

At its root, a military alliance increases a state’s security through the addition of another state’s military might, or its hard power. In fact, alliance formation behavior is traditionally explained through changes in the balance of power. Therefore, the power differential, meaning the ratio between two states’ power, should impact the nature of alliances.

With regards to flipping, power differentials can have two reinforcing impacts: the weight the divider state, or flipper, can bring to bear on the situation and the security the target state, or flippee, could gain if it flips. A large power differential between the flipper and flippee can both pressure the flippee into abandoning its ally as well as reassure it that it is entering a powerful alliance once it does. In contrast, a small power differential is unlikely to move the flippee into action and would provide little comfort even if it flips. Moreover, the spurned ally may seek to prevent the dissolution of its alliance and act accordingly. Therefore, under any circumstance, the flipped state will need to be reassured that it would be protected from possible retaliation during the flipping process.
Often translated as the amount of existing military forces and resources convertible into future military forces, power plays a central role in improving a state’s security, particularly in alignments. While less tangible factors, such as legitimacy or diplomatic and financial support, are also important, they are amplified by a state’s military capabilities. An alliance is a means by which a state can improve its security, which Snyder defines as “a high confidence of preserving, against external military attack, values presently held.” In such a case, diplomatic and financial support can only help a state deter or weather an attack if they are seen as proxies or gateways for the commitment of additional military capabilities. Just like planets and moons shine brighter because of the sun, increased power buttresses all other factors that can improve a state’s security. Therefore, the more powerful the flipper is, the more likely it will be able to offer increased security, and the more appealing a flip is to the targeted state.

However, this straightforward assumption also highlights the more complex inter-temporal choice it faces. How does a state incorporate its assessment of future expected changes to relative power into its alignment decisions? Would it preemptively flip alliances even if it were satisfied with the status quo? How does a state weigh current versus future alliance utility? At a minimum, the new alliance would need to be powerful enough to counterbalance the spurned ally. While measuring today’s power differential is important, its perception of the power differential discount rate should theoretically determine its assessment of its alignment choices.

Furthermore, does polarity—the distribution of power in the international system—impact either the desire or the ability of states to flip? Theoretically, the greater the number of competing powers in the world, the more interest and opportunities there

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46 Snyder, 5.
should be for states to flip sides. Under that assumption, flipping should be non-existent under unipolarity and more commonplace under multipolarity. Unsurprisingly, Snyder’s seminal study on alliance management examines alliances only in a multipolar system largely because he assumed that the end of the Cold War would inaugurate such an era.47 The geopolitical instability that many scholars assume is caused by multipolarity naturally could extend to the fate of alliances.

Yet, there are several reasons why polarity, or at least the difference between bipolarity and multipolarity, is unlikely to be determinative of whether states change their geopolitical allegiances. First, a cursory historical examination reveals that the number or frequency of alliance flips does not correlate with the number of great powers in the international system. Second, while it is tempting to always conceive of polarity on a global scale, the regional or local dispersion of power is likely far more relevant. The impact of polarity is not the same in each era. Finally, while most scholars presume that multipolarity generates more alliance instability than bipolarity, bipolarity could actually incentivize more flips because the flip of even a single state could destabilize the bipolar equilibrium. Ergo, there does not appear to be a direct relationship between the number and size of great powers in the world and how easily or frequently states change their alignments.

The working universe of successful flips reveals that almost all successful flips involve a more powerful state flipping a less powerful state.48 While the size of the power differential varies, its existence is critical. This revelation is hardly a surprise. Flipping is typically an endeavor whereby larger states compete over the allegiances of smaller

47 Snyder, Alliance Politics.
48 This will be addressed in my analysis of Table C (Successful Flips, 1815-2009) later in the chapter.
states. It is far more likely for a more powerful state to impact the alignment of a less powerful state than vice versa. Consequently, the presence of a power differential between the flipper and the flippee would seem to be a necessary, but not sufficient condition to a successful flip. Similarly, there seems to be no correlation between the magnitude of the power differential and a successful flip. Therefore, it should not be treated as a co-equal variable and it will likely appear in case studies as an unspoken but omnipresent condition.

*Flipping Strategy*

As mentioned earlier, flipping strategies are thoroughly examined by Crawford, who labels them wedge strategies, e.g., the means to influence other states’ alignments. By exploiting the naturally occurring intra-alliance tensions of the alliance security dilemma, a divider state can change the alignment calculus of the targeted state. Strategies of accommodation seek to lure the target out of its existing alliance by offering inducements, which vary in cost and effectiveness. Likewise, strategies of confrontation seek to cause cracks in the alliance by exposing the natural differences in the interests of its members. While the mechanisms are distinct, both play on the abandonment-entrapment dynamic and can pay large dividends.

While the flipper can impact the aforementioned three variables by sparking domestic rifts, fostering alliance discontent, or internal balancing, it cannot wholly control these factors. By contrast, it can select the strategy it thinks will most likely lead to a successful flip. Logically, a flipper’s choice of strategy is dependent on the reality at hand. For example, coercive measures are unlikely to work if the power differential is
minimal whereas accommodative efforts may prove fruitless if the flippee is more concerned about an internal challenge than an external one. Theoretically, these strategies complement some of the more structural factors that frame international relations. Therefore, just like the right strategy could produce a flip that otherwise would not occur, the wrong strategy could forestall a flip that was likely to occur. In many ways, the importance of flipping strategies is a challenge to the strict structural realist interpretation of alliance formation and management. Diplomacy matters.

While a flipping strategy seems important, it is not a truly independent variable, but usually, although not exclusively, a derivative of other factors. A state does not select a strategy independently or randomly, but instead bases its choice on a careful and rational assessment of itself, the flippee, and the spurned state, among numerous other geopolitical variables. It is thus not an independent variable and therefore does not merit independent hypotheses. Moreover, as Crawford, in his study of wedge strategies, admits, even with the right diplomatic strategy, “realignments, except when there are deep, exploitable cleavages, are not obtainable.”49 The right flipping strategy is, at best, a secondary variable.

Nevertheless, its presence in the cases will be apparent and therefore should be examined. Could a flipper make an offer of alliance terms so attractive that it would tempt a weak regime that is content in its alliance to switch sides? Likewise, could a flipper offer such punitive alliance terms or act in such a threatening manner that it tempers the enthusiasm of an otherwise strong regime that is unhappy in its alliance? Theoretically, both are possible, yet highly implausible. Only in one case, the flip of Tuscany in the mid-19th century, does a flip occur when regime cohesion is weak and

49 Crawford, 167.
alliance cohesion is strong, possibly indicating—although not proving—that a flipping strategy overwhelmed the causal function of the other variables. Even as additional cases are added to the working universe of successful flips, the existence of such a small number of similar instances means these outliers can be examined as such without needing to reopen the typological construct.

Table A visually maps the typological space and sheds light on why neither power differential nor flipping strategy should be considered as principal variables in understanding why states flip. Outcomes marked in italics highlight any expected change from including the additional variables.

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50 See Table D (Typology of Successful Flips, 1815-2009).
Table A: Four-Variable Typological Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regime Cohesion</th>
<th>Alliance Cohesion</th>
<th>Expected Two Variable Result</th>
<th>Power Differential</th>
<th>Expected Three Variable Result</th>
<th>Flipping Strategy</th>
<th>Expected Four Variable Result</th>
<th>Overall Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td></td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td></td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td></td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Flip or Flop</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Flip</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coercion</td>
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<td>Weak</td>
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<td>Flop</td>
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<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Flip or Flop</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
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<td>Big</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>Flop</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A indicates that the inclusion of both power differential and flipping strategy as equal variables only impacts the result when the expected individual impacts of regime cohesion and alliance cohesion are at odds with each other. Moreover, eliminating power differential and flipping strategy from the typological space, even while admitting their presence within individual case studies, also makes the study more manageable, reducing the number of potential typological permutations by three-quarters.
(from 16 to 4) without a parallel drop in explanatory power. It also narrows and more powerfully suggests which boxes or case types should be examined rigorously.\footnote{Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, \textit{Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 246.}

Having considered but ultimately eliminated two oft-cited factors, this study will examine why states flip by focusing on the two remaining variables, regime cohesion and alliance cohesion. Table B below summarizes how these two independent factors combine to create four different typological pathways to the desired outcome.

**Table B: Two-Variable Typological Map**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Regime Cohesion</th>
<th>Alliance Cohesion</th>
<th>Expected Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Flop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Flip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Flop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Flip or Flop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Typological Cases**

Of the four possible flipping pathways Table B delineates, Scenario B confidently foresees a successful flip while Scenario D possibly foresees one. Scenarios A and C anticipate flops, failed flips. Consequently, I would expect that most of the cases of successful flips fall into Scenario B while the remaining follow Scenario D. Below, I have outlined the expected logic that each of the four pathways would follow.

Scenario A: Strong Regime Cohesion and Strong Alliance Cohesion \(\rightarrow\) **Flop**

Enmeshed in a strong and cohesive alliance, the flippee is likely uninterested in entreaties from other actors. Although the regime is cohesive enough to undergo such a radical alignment transformation without fissuring, it has little incentive to do so let alone
to take on even moderate risk. For it to even consider doing so, the new alliance terms would have to be significantly more attractive than the status quo. If anything, an external offer could prompt increased bargaining within the current alliance, but will likely not cause a reevaluation of its worth.

In such a scenario, one would expect to see a debate within the regime as to the advantages and disadvantages of the external alliance offer. Given its general satisfaction with its current alliance and strong political cohesion, the debate would likely be more candid than secret and more passive than active. Just as the regime does not fear the flip attempt becoming a divisive issue, there are also no factions in the regime who have an incentive to aggressively champion the offer. Instead, the regime is likely to use the flip attempt as a means to bargain for a better arrangement with its current partners.

Cataloguing examples of non-events is difficult, but one can imagine numerous flops that meet these conditions. For example, Soviet attempts to split the Scandinavian NATO members, Norway and Denmark, from the anti-Soviet alliance notably failed. Despite the alliance—as well as its obligations—sometimes being a source of controversy both within these countries and within NATO itself, neither issue rose high enough to warrant the consideration of Soviet appeals as a means to improve positioning. A combination of an asymmetric Soviet power ratio as well as domestic opposition may well have contributed to the limitation on foreign troops in Norway or Denmark’s refusal to station nuclear weapons on its soil, but these reservations were accommodated within NATO and were not successfully exploited by Moscow.

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Interestingly enough, there are two cases of successful flips that meet these conditions: the flip of Germany by the Soviet Union in 1939 (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) and the flip of Jordan by Iraq in 1990 (keeping Jordan out of the Gulf War.) While the impetuses for both these flips are different—deception on Germany’s part, short-term survival on Jordan’s—they do have one thing in common: they were not lasting. Hitler famously broke his non-aggression pact with Stalin less than two years later while the Hashemite Kingdom was quickly absolved of any wrongdoing by the United States and showered with aid shortly thereafter. By some definitions, these cases may not even be considered full flips given their quick reversion to the status quo ante.

Scenario B: Strong Regime Cohesion and Weak Alliance Cohesion → Flip

This scenario is the most likely to produce a realignment, the proverbial jackpot. Facing little internal opposition and in a weak alignment, the regime is both able and interested in improving its geopolitical position. Having matched a prime flipping opportunity with an attractive flipping offer, Scenario B is the most straight-forward, high-reward pathway for a successful flip. Although likely hidden from view at first, rifts within an alliance eventually manifest themselves publicly, as a state changes its behavior in opposition to its partners’ moves. Privately, one would expect to see senior officials express concern over the actions of their ally and their negative impact on their own state’s interests. The flurry of behind-the-scenes behavior is likely the result of the constant push-pull, abandonment-entrapment dilemma detailed by Snyder. Public expressions of such tensions would include harsh rhetoric between the two states, policy
disagreements over issues central to the alliance, changes in defense policy that seem to reassess their ally’s friendliness, etc.

While these strains are natural to all alliances, they become more cogent if the alliance terms are weak to begin with and if the alliance’s institutions and bonds are less developed. For example, whereas NATO members routinely have major policy disagreements that generate considerable acrimony, NATO’s high degree of institutionalization—from joint command and training to weapons acquisitions and basing to political as well as military coordinating councils—and common “Western” identity have prevented the alliance from falling apart over these rifts. In contrast, alliances with minimal terms, little institutionalization, and deep ideational cleavages—such as the Nazi-Soviet alliance or Soviet-American alliance during World War II—cannot withstand shifts in interests as readily.

These preexisting factors become aggravated when an alternative alignment offer emerges. Originally faced with the unappealing choice of going it alone or attempting to bargain for a better deal within the alliance, the dissatisfied state can now seriously entertain the idea of flipping alignments and begins discussions with its heretofore rival. The strong cohesion of the regime means that such a transformation, while complex and risky under the best of circumstances, is less likely to be successfully exploited domestically for political gain.

Scenario C: Weak Regime Cohesion and Strong Alliance Cohesion $\rightarrow$ **Flop**

Weak regime cohesion and strong alliance cohesion means the flippee is both likely unable and disinclined to seek a change in alignment. Content in its current
alliance, a disjointed regime would be incredibly wary of creating additional problems for itself by attempting such a geopolitical transformation. Whereas in a strong regime one would expect to see an external bid assessed openly and vigorously, senior diplomatic officials are more likely to be circumspect in this scenario, fearing that such an issue could only further dissension within the regime. If they occur at all, discussions would remain within a smaller circle, but could also possibly contain analysis as to whether the putative new alliance could strengthen the dominant faction within the regime, similar to David’s concept of “omniloading.” Unsurprisingly, there are no successful cases in Table D that meet these conditions.

Scenario D: Weak Regime Cohesion and Weak Alliance Cohesion → **Flip or Flop**

Similar to Scenario B, an alternative alignment is especially attractive to a state dissatisfied with its current arrangement. However, internal regime divisions make executing such a transformation riskier and could ward off any attempt. If the regime believes the new alliance will strengthen its domestic standing, then this scenario is likely to be as strong as scenario B, the jackpot scenario. If the regime believes allying with its former adversary will empower its domestic opponents at its expense, then the decision and the process become more agonizing. For example, in the 1980s, Lebanon’s flitting between Israel and Syria, as competing factions in the Lebanese Civil War sought advantages, literally cost numerous leaders their lives.

The possibility of such high costs are likely to dominate the atmosphere surrounding the regime’s choice. Would abandoning its current ally to embark on a partnership with a former adversary empower or outflank domestic factions? Either way,
the deliberations are likely to be held close to the vest in order to minimize the potential blowback by presenting the flip as a *fait accompli*. Assuming the regime believes it will survive such a transformation, the alliance improvement opportunity might be too good to pass on regardless. Unlike in other scenarios, the magnitude of the power differential and the flipping strategy may matter more than usual.

*How Many Flips Have There Been?*

In order to generate a systematic flipping universe, I have built my own dataset carved from ATOP. Using ATOP’s coding for alliance termination, I isolated all alliances that were terminated prematurely, either through an intra-member dispute or a violation of the alliance terms. Of the 1,994 observations in the member-level dataset, 565 were abrogated prematurely. Using the 565 prematurely terminated alliances as a temporal starting point, I returned to the original ATOP dataset and combed for new alliances initiated within the subsequent decade by the same state. Finally, I compared the two sets and retained only those observations where a state’s previous and subsequent allies were antagonistic to each other. I also eliminated those observations where the flip was a result of internal regime change. For example, the Russian Revolution led the Soviet Union to abandon all of its diplomatic commitments and even exit World War I. Similarly, coups in the Middle East—Iraq in 1958, Yemen in 1962, Libya in 1969, and Iran in 1979—all resulted in dramatic strategic orientations and alliance abrogations, but, as explained previously, are not relevant for this study.

There are two major problems with this approach, although neither necessarily instills bias into the results. First, ATOP defines an alliance as a formal written
agreement. Not only does the dataset exclude all informal ones, but also the duration of the alliance is set according to the dates of the signed contracts. Therefore, this definition is not only stricter than my definition of alliances, but also undercounts the number of flips by using such restrictive alliance initiation and termination dates. For example, according to ATOP, the Sino-Soviet alliance ends only in 1980 when China chooses not to renew their defense pact. Were I to wholly adopt ATOP’s coding, not only would this not qualify as a premature termination, but it would have occurred several years after the U.S.-China rapprochement and more than a decade after Sino-Soviet skirmishes. Since my definition of an alliance includes non-codified agreements, I am also including additional cases not found in ATOP into my dataset as I discover them.

Second, this approach can create a useable dataset of flips, but not of flops, i.e., failed flip attempts. Flip attempts tend not to be one-off endeavors, but instead can involve years of work through various approaches. Each flip could plausibly be preceded by many flops involving the same actors. The American flips of both China and Egypt in the early 1970s followed years of failure to pry them loose from the Soviet orbit. Just as it is easier to catalogue wars that occurred as opposed to wars that did not occur, flips are readily identifiable while flops are not. Conceivably, one could build a universe of flops, but not in any systematic or comprehensive way. Only by thoroughly examining a specific case of flipping failure and, perhaps, comparing it with one of flipping success can one understand the underlying dynamics.

Table C is a working chart of flips that uses ATOP as a foundational source. As noted above, the true universe of flips is certainly larger but Table C represents a serious foundation to cataloguing a comprehensive list.
Table C: Successful Flips, 1815-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flippee</th>
<th>Spurned State</th>
<th>Flipper</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
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<td>France</td>
<td>1822-1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1861-1863</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1866</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td>Yugoslavia, Greece</td>
<td>Ottoman Empire</td>
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<td>Warsaw Pact States</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>1991-2009</td>
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</table>
**Research Design**

In order to specify the various pathways to a successful flip, I have developed a typological theory, as described by Alexander George and Andrew Bennett. A typological theory can “specify the pathways through which particular types relate to specified outcomes” and also allows for the “possibility of equifinality—the same outcome can arise through different pathways.”\(^{54}\) Typological theorizing can also help combine structural and agent-centered theories because of the interplay between the two.\(^ {55}\) By constructing a “theory-based map of the property space,” I can chart each combination of variables, which also informs my selection of case studies.

Having established a working universe of cases and delineated the possible paths to a flip, I will use process-tracing methods to test the hypothetical causal dynamics described above. I am seeking to examine not only if my variables matter, but also how much they matter and how they interact with each other. Additionally, the process-tracing case study method allows for the testing of established alternative theories.\(^ {56}\)

Several factors have determined my case study selection. First, I have chosen cases that are geopolitically significant, such as the flip of China during the Cold War. While flipping behavior is not limited to the size of the state or the magnitude of the consequences, flip attempts by middle and great powers have the greatest value due to the import of their consequences. Second, several of my cases will involve within-case analyses in order to trace how a flip attempt evolved over time. Although a great power may have tried for years to flip another state, it may not succeed until there are changes in one of the variables. Table D classifies the universe of

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\(^{54}\) George and Bennett, 235.
\(^{55}\) George and Bennett, 245.
\(^{56}\) George and Bennett, 30.
successful flips according to the typological pathways I outlined previously. Of the thirty-six cases I have catalogued, only three did not conform to the expected theoretical pathways.

**Table D: Typology of Successful Flips, 1815-2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case #</th>
<th>Flippee</th>
<th>Spurned State</th>
<th>flipper</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Regime Cohesion</th>
<th>Alliance Cohesion</th>
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<th>Type</th>
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Dissertation Table of Contents

Chapter One: Definitions, Data, and Theory

This chapter establishes the scope of the project. It states the puzzle I am trying to answer as well as why I believe it is important. It includes my definition of flipping, the universe of cases I have built, as well as the different flipping typologies that are derived from key variables. It also includes an extensive examination of the hypotheses I have developed, which in turn informs the cases that will be examined in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two: Sadat’s Predicament: Egypt Between the Two Superpowers

In the 1970s, the United States successfully flipped Egypt away from the Soviet Union, helping broker a peace between Israel and Egypt that saw Egypt abandon its position as leader of the rejectionist Arab bloc.\(^57\) Dating back to the Eisenhower Administration, Washington had enacted a variety of strategies to pry Egypt away from its Soviet patron, but succeeded only during the Carter Administration. The flip of Sadat’s Egypt fits the prototype of Scenario B: a strong and cohesive regime that is in a discordant alliance.

Chapter Three: “We Have Now Become Tacit Allies”: Exploiting the Sino-Soviet Split

The American attempt to split China from the Soviet Union began in 1949, but was only successful in 1972. Similar to the Egypt case, this chapter also entails a within-case analysis, tracing and comparing the efforts of different American administrations to flip China from the Soviet camp into the American camp. The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nixon administrations each implemented a different

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\(^57\) For the purposes of this study, I will be using the terms Soviet Union and Russia interchangeably, even though they are distinct entities.
strategy to attempt to flip China, but only Nixon was ultimately successful. While this case also follows the same pathway as Egypt, it is the archetype of a flip and no in-depth study would be complete without it.

Chapter Four: The Myth of Sacro Egoismo: Italy and World War I

Prior to World War I, Britain and France successfully flipped Italy away from the Triple Alliance to the Triple Entente. French entreaties began in the 1890s, but Italy did not break with its three-decade old alliance until after war had become imminent. Originally beset with exceptionally chaotic and weak regimes, the Italian government becomes more cohesive before it flips.

Chapter Five: Breaking the Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The United Kingdom after the War

As early as 1897, the United States had identified Japan as a rival in the Pacific. Although the Anglo-American relationship had warmed greatly at the turn of the century and the two had fought together in Word War I, the U.S. remained very concerned about the Anglo-Japanese alliance. Until then, Western powers had often operated in concert in some regions, while competing in others. After the war and in the form of various arms limitation agreements, the United States was able to successfully flip the United Kingdom away from its Japanese partner, an action that would have major consequences in the decades to come.58

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The concluding chapter will summarize the results of the dissertation, propose further areas of study, and detail the implications for policymakers today.

58 For the purposes of this study, I will be using the terms Great Britain, Britain, England, and the United Kingdom interchangeably. At this moment in history, the British Empire had large Asia-Pacific holdings: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaya, India, and other smaller entities. The territorial picture is important to understanding how key the Anglo-Japanese alliance was for all three players.
Flipping behavior remains pervasive as the competition for supremacy amongst the great powers continues.
Chapter Two: Sadat’s Predicament: Egypt Between the Two Superpowers

In July 1980, twelve U.S. Phantom F-4E fighter jets flew from Georgia to a recently constructed airfield nineteen miles west of Cairo, marking the U.S. Air Force’s (USAF) first tactical deployment to Egypt. The squadron participated in Operation Proud Phantom, a joint exercise with the Egyptian Air Force and the first between the two countries. Later that fall, soldiers from the 101st Airborne joined Egyptian forces to conduct Operation Bright Star, a multifaceted ten-day exercise that continues biennially to this day. Egypt had, for the first time, received a $1.5 billion military loan from the United States the year before. The U.S. military would soon make extensive use of Egyptian facilities, including for the ultimately unsuccessful 1980 Iran hostage rescue mission. Egypt also became one of the first participants in Washington’s plan to arm Afghan mujahdeen against the Soviet Union, allowing the CIA to quickly funnel Egyptian stockpiles of old Soviet weapons to the insurgents.

Six years earlier, the two countries did not even have diplomatic relations. Egypt, along with Syria, had launched a surprise war against Israel, pitting two Soviet-armed states against an American-armed force in what became known as the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Egypt was the Soviet Union’s premier client state in the Middle East, the recipient of billions of dollars of arms, aid, and training. Ten years prior to the first USAF

60 Brownlee, 39.
deployment to Egypt, Soviet forces even defended Egypt, engaging Israeli forces in combat during the War of Attrition in 1969-1970.

How did Egypt transform from being the point of the Soviet spear in the Middle East to a pillar of the American alliance system in just a few short years? How was Egypt flipped from being an American adversary to being an American ally?

Traditionally, Egypt’s realignment with the United States is explained through the prism of the 1978 Camp David Accords and subsequent Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. When it shed its rejectionist approach and embraced Israel, Egypt was rewarded with American engagement, followed by American aid and American arms. Over the subsequent three and a half decades, any Egyptian wavering from its peace treaty with Israel has been immediately met with vociferous calls from the U.S. Congress to reevaluate military aid and arms sales. One need only compare Egypt’s path to Syria’s to see that a more productive relationship with Israel could be rewarded with American largesse. For two decades after the end of the Cold War, American efforts to “flip” Syria away from its Iranian ally have floundered on Syria’s unwillingness to make peace with Israel.

However, this narrative reverses the causality. Egypt’s flip from the Soviet to the American Cold War camp was not the consequence, but the cause of Egyptian-Israeli peace. Egypt leveraged its relationship with America to ultimately extract Israel’s full withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, which it had held since 1967. Cairo broke with

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Moscow and realigned with Washington before the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, before the 1978 Camp David Accords, and even before President Anwar Sadat’s groundbreaking November 1977 voyage to Jerusalem. In fact, Sadat’s trip did not initiate Egypt’s flip, but salvaged it, after the Carter Administration had reengaged Moscow in Arab-Israeli diplomacy.

The Soviet-Egyptian alliance formally ended in 1976, but the seeds of its demise were sown by Egypt’s humiliating defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War and were rotting in the aftermath of Soviet-American Détente announced in May 1972. Terminated in 1967, U.S.-Egyptian relations were reestablished in early 1974. American economic aid went from $800,000 in 1973 to $21.3 million in 1974 to $370.1 million in 1975 to $464.3 million in 1976—all before Sadat’s Jerusalem journey. Long before serious prospects of Egyptian-Israeli peace, Egypt had flipped from the Soviet to the American camp.

**The Case**

The interplay of two key factors best explains Egypt’s flip. First, the Egyptian regime under Sadat had become strong and cohesive. By the middle of 1971, Sadat had eliminated intra-regime rivals, restructured the institutions of political power, and secured the loyalty of the armed forces. He even preempted a coup by his primary political adversary, who was more closely aligned with the Soviet Union. Additionally, Egypt’s “victory” in the 1973 Yom Kippur War further elevated Sadat’s status, dissuading any potential challengers to his decisions. As Michael Handel writes, “chosen for his weakness, Sadat quickly demonstrated a facility for political maneuvering by attaining a

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66 Sharp, 24-25.
virtual monopoly of power by 1971.”67 Before making any costly turn towards the United States, Sadat had amassed complete decision-making autonomy and full control over the security forces, ensuring that no rival power base could exploit such a radical realignment.

Second, the Soviet-Egyptian alliance had become disjointed and lacked cohesion. Beginning in 1967, Cairo chaffed under Soviet-imposed political constraints and military restrictions. Concerned about Egyptian adventurism, Moscow refused to provide Cairo with desired weapons and used its presence to restrain, rather than support, Egyptian desires to reverse the outcome of the Six-Day War. Egyptian and Soviet interests were diverging, culminating with the announcement of Soviet-American Détente in May 1972, a betrayal in Cairo’s eyes. While Soviet forces were stationed in Egyptian territory, the lack of any developed alliance institutions allowed Egypt to eject them easily when the moment came. Without a tight alliance structure to restrain its approach and frustrated with Soviet policy, Egypt began seeking an alternative alignment. Sadat knew he could never get America to treat it like Israel, but he “imagined that Cairo could enjoy equal status with Iran in the Middle East—a far better deal than Nasser had managed.”68

A Little History

Although Egypt received some Soviet arms in the early days of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it was not until the Free Officers, a cadre of senior Egyptian army officers,

overthrew the Egyptian monarchy in 1952 that Egypt truly aligned with Moscow. Nevertheless, the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations attempted to woo the new regime, immediately providing Egypt with considerable economic aid. Although he failed to induce Nasser to join the Baghdad Pact—a wall of states preventing Soviet intrusion into the region—Eisenhower still rescued him during the 1956 Suez Crisis, pressuring the United Kingdom, France, and Israel to humiliatingly withdraw from Egyptian territory. Under the Food for Peace program (Public Law 480), the U.S. also provided Egypt with surplus American grain transforming her into the largest per capita consumer of American food aid in less than a decade.

Egypt’s signing of a gigantic arms deal with Soviet client Czechoslovakia on September 27th, 1955 signaled that it had cast its lot with the Soviet camp. Over the next two decades, Moscow provided it with at least $3 billion in military aid, most of which was long-term loans at low interest rates or in exchange for cotton. Moscow was granted access to Egyptian harbors and airfields, providing shelter for its squadron, aerial cover for its ships, and reconnaissance flights over NATO ships, and sent thousands of technicians and advisers to train Egypt’s military in adopting Soviet military doctrine and

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70 Laron, 1.
71 Laron, 4.
72 Brownlee, 17.
73 Laron, 9-10. Egypt signed a commercial agreement with Czechoslovakia on October 24th, 1951 that included a clause for arms sales. Although no arms were provided for four years, it is under this treaty and clause through which Egypt secured its massive Czechoslovakian arms sale. From 1951-1955, the Czechoslovakians kept finding an excuse to delay arms shipments. Nasser also helped broker a similar deal for Syria, funneled through Egypt. Laron, 39-40.
incorporating Soviet weaponry. By the eve of the Six-Day War, Egypt was the prime Soviet proxy in the region.

The 1967 war decimated Egypt and initially prompted it to double-down on its Soviet dependence. With Israeli troops controlling the entire Sinai Peninsula and comfortably situated on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, Egypt expected Moscow to rebuild its devastated armed forces and help it erode Israel’s clear military superiority. Yet, the defeat of such a heavily armed client state also put the Soviet Union in a bind: it needed to reassure Egypt and restore its position in the region, yet simultaneously moderate Egypt’s behavior to avoid getting dragged into another unwinnable war, which could end its regional foothold for good. The Soviets would rebuild Egypt’s position enough so that it could “bargain for a settlement rather than submit to one, but not so much that they might be tempted to contemplate reversing the outcome of the war by another war.”

Misunderstanding the subtle, yet unmistakable shift in the Soviet approach, Nasser instead sought to compel an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai through attrition. As low-level attacks by Egyptian forces near the Canal escalated, Israel began deep bombing raids against the Egyptian air defense system, even reaching the outskirts of Cairo. Desperate for help, Nasser elicited a Soviet commitment to provide large numbers of new SAM-3 and older SAM-2 missiles as well as the deployment of Soviet pilots to man Egypt’s aerial defenses. After Israel downed five Soviet fighters on July 30th, 1970, the

75 Sella, 33.
77 Safran, 264.
two sides quickly agreed to a ceasefire that restored the status quo ante. Nasser’s attrition strategy had failed, but the war had exposed cracks in the Soviet-Egyptian alliance. For Egypt, the alliance was becoming both a physical and political burden.

Sadat’s Ascension: A Divided Regime

Nasser’s death on September 28th, 1970 rattled Egypt. Although immediately supplanted by Vice President Anwar Sadat, his death initiated a contest for succession within different regime power bases. Sadat was a compromise choice among Nasser’s many potential heirs, such as former Vice President Abdul Latif Bagdadi, Secretary-General of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) Ali Sabri, former Vice President Kamal Al Din Hussein, and former minister Sami Sharaf—all Nasser loyalists. Realizing it was better to collaborate than compete directly for power, these rivals put forward Sadat as a consensus candidate, a figurehead. The real power would reside in Sabri, who was appointed vice president along with Hussein al-Shafi’i, Minister of Interior Sharawi Guma’a, and Abd al-Muhsin Abu al-Nur, Sabri’s ally who became Secretary-General of the ASU.

On the heels of Nasser’s larger-than-life personality, nothing much was expected of Sadat. The new president had even collapsed at Nasser’s funeral, furthering the impression that he would not hold onto the job long. Ostensibly weak and too gentle a leader, he seemed “emasculated” by more powerful rivals. An early CIA assessment noted that Sadat did not “carry much political weight,” that it was “doubtful” he would

78 Safran, 265.
80 Gardner, 116.
81 Sirrs, 117.
hold the presidency for more than an interim period, and that he would be merely a
figurehead while the real power lay with the Sabri clique. As John Waterbury, an expert
on Egypt’s domestic politics, wrote, “Sadat could truthfully claim that he stood naked in
the post-1967 jungle of elite politics. He had no institutional base of power and no
organized clientele.” Egypt’s regime was fractious and brittle, allegiances were divided,
and Sadat was powerless. Concerned first and foremost by his own political survival, the
new president was hardly predisposed to perturb Egypt’s predicament.

Sadat was fully aware of his tenuous political position. In order to blunt his rivals
successfully, Sadat needed the continued support of both the Armed Forces and the
Soviet Union, whose interests were represented by rivals Lt. Gen. Mohamed Ahmed
Sadiq and Sabri respectively. While he was powerless to prevent the removal of Hafez
Isma’il as director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS), Sadat managed
to marginalize his successor, Ahmed Kamel, a Sabri ally. He also recruited Military
Intelligence Department (MID) Director Mihriz Mustafa Abd al-Rahman and Alexandria
Governor Mamduh Salem, who had roots in the secret police and the ASU, the country’s
sole political party that was an outgrowth of and vehicle for Nasser’s Free Officers
Movement. Sadat avoided any radical moves while his rivals were still in powerful
positions.

82 CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “Nasir’s Death: The Immediate Aftermath,” September 29th, 1970;
Telegram from Rogers (Department of State) to various embassies, “Internal Political Situation in UAR,“
October 14th, 1970 in Sirrs, 117.
83 John Waterbury, The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes (Princeton, NJ:
84 Handel, 244.
85 Sirrs, 118-119. Sadat’s skillful maneuvering had critical ramifications: Isma’il reportedly alerted Sadat to
the budding conspiracy against him in April 1971 while Sadat later jailed Kamel for failing to warn him of
the Sabri-led coup.
86 Sirrs, 119.
Nonetheless, Sadat was contemplating a different course. He desired continued Soviet military and financial support, but believed that adopting a more reasonable demeanor, compared with Nasser’s outright antagonism of Washington, could yield additional diplomatic pressure on Israel. In a February 4th, 1971 speech to the National Assembly, he announced a peace initiative, but little of it was actually novel.\(^\text{87}\) That same month, he also accepted in principle the United Nations-sponsored Jarring proposal. Careful not to propose anything bold, he also made sure to exhibit no public displeasure with his existing geopolitical patron.\(^\text{88}\) Mere months after assuming power, he was not prepared to radically reorient two decades of Egyptian foreign policy for fear of providing openings for his political rivals.

Naturally, Sabri, Sadat’s chief rival to the throne, was suspicious of Sadat’s discernable American outreach.\(^\text{89}\) Sabri had personally conducted the 1955 Czechoslovakian arms sales negotiations that had bound Egypt to the Soviet bloc in the first place.\(^\text{90}\) Judging Sadat to be weak and malleable, he had initially backed Sadat’s appointment, but now fretted that he could no longer steer Sadat like expected.\(^\text{91}\) Having emerged from the intelligence sector, not the Free Officer’s Movement, Sabri’s faction was less respectful of the army and set about plotting Sadat’s downfall.\(^\text{92}\)

In sum, Sadat assumed power as a weak leader in a divided regime. He expressed interest in better relations with the United States, but only as a tactical maneuver and without making any substantive policy shift. Well aware of his weak status, Sadat was

\(^{87}\) For detailed look at the initiative and why it was somewhat of a signal but not very substantive, see Handel, 254-267.

\(^{88}\) Binder, 386.

\(^{89}\) Sirrs, 117.

\(^{90}\) Laron, 32-33.

\(^{91}\) Brownlee, 19.

careful not to risk inflaming his intra-regime rivals. In the initial months of his reign, Sadat sought to shore up his support as best he could.

**Regime Conflict**

Before pursuing a new diplomatic direction, Sadat needed to neutralize his principal rival Sabri, who, in turn, sought to mobilize different pillars of the regime in order to weaken Sadat. He excoriated Sadat for signing the April 17th, 1971 “Benghazi Declaration”—a political federation between Egypt, Syria, and Libya—without the prior approval of the ASU and the National Assembly. 93 Meanwhile, Guma’a secretly deployed the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) to state radio and television facilities to preempt Sadat’s attempt to mobilize the masses. Minister of War General Mohamed Fawzi organized Cairo-based units for a coup and instructed the Electronic Warfare Department to prepare jamming the communication systems of the foreign embassies. 94

Sadat contested Sabri’s charges, demonstrating he had included a proviso that the agreement would have to be approved not only by both the ASU and the Assembly, but also in a national referendum. At an April 21st, 1971 meeting of the eight-member ASU Higher Executive Committee, Sabri viciously attacked Sadat’s policies. The Committee ruled in Sabri’s favor five-to-three, with only Prime Minister Mahmoud Fawzi and Vice President Hussein el-Shafei voting alongside Sadat. 95 Sadat immediately referred the issue to the 150-member ASU Central Committee and summoned his military leaders to gauge their support for him. At the Central Committee vote, Sabri attacked Sadat again,

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93 Binder, 386-387. For a full accounting of the political machinations between Sadat and Sabri, see Binder, 386-396.
94 Sirrs, 119.
95 Handel, 244-245.
but the Central Committee endorsed the amended federation proposal and the Assembly unanimously ratified it. Sadat had not only survived Sabri’s trap, but had outmaneuvered him.

Certain that he had to act before Sabri did, Sadat publicly condemned his opponents in a May 1st speech and fired Sabri as vice president the next day, a naked attempt to decapitate the opposing faction.96 Over the next ten days, Sabri’s clique plotted to remove Sadat from power, although exactly how remains unclear.97 To protect himself, Sadat sought and received the tacit support of the Army and dismissed Guma’a and ordered his replacement, the new Minister of Interior Mamduh Salem, to confiscate the ministry’s incriminating tapes. That evening, Sabri and his allies, including the Speaker of the National Assembly, the War Minister, the Information Minister, the Presidential Affairs Minister, and some members of the ASU Central Committee, tendered their resignations in the hope of catalyzing a coup.98 If the mass resignations were immediately publicly broadcast, the conspirators surmised, public disorder would ensue, prompting the military to intervene, eject Sadat, and install Sabri in order to quell the chaos.

Essentially, the plotters hoped to enlist the Egyptian public to justify a military coup to oust Sadat.

The plot failed spectacularly, for it was Sadat who would emerge supreme. Sadat immediately accepted the resignations, publicized them, and moved quickly to replace

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97 Accounts differ as to how Sadat discovered the plot. One suggests that, on May 10th, a police officer informed Sadat of a plot to assassinate him on May 13th during a visit to al-Tahrir province. Another reports that it was a GID major that approached Sadat with secret tapes of senior ASU officials discussing a move against the president. A third account suggests that CIA case officer Thomas Twetten conveyed to Sadat aide Ashraf Marwan that the United States had intercepted phone conversations of KGB asset Vladimir Sakharov about an anti-Sadat conspiracy. If the second account is accurate, it might provide an alternate explanation for Sadat’s subsequent moves towards the United States. Handel, 245; Sirrs, 120.
98 Sadat, 224.
them. He installed General Sadiq as Minister of War and called General Ahmed Ismail out of retirement to replace Kamel, who was also jailed for his alleged failure to warn Sadat of the plot, to be Director of Intelligence. The conspirators were put under house arrest and formally arrested on May 16th. In a May 15th public address to supportive popular demonstrations, Sadat revealed that the plot had come from inside the ASU and the internal security apparatus. Having eliminated his direct political rival, he then moved to coopt other regime institutions before pushing ahead on any major change in Egypt’s foreign policy. The military and internal security services were still filled with potential challengers and the ASU was still led by Nasserites, both of which would oppose any abandonment of the Soviet Union.

First, Sadat replaced military leaders. Although he had promoted Sadiq, Sadat’s intent was to kick him upstairs and thus neutralize his influence. He subsequently sought to strengthen the younger generation of officers at the expense of the Nasserite Free Officers. For example, he formed an Armed Forces Council that excluded the Minister of War (Sadiq), but included the commanders of the First, Second, and Third Armies, the Air Force, Navy and Army Commanders, the Chiefs of Air Defense and of Military Intelligence, and the Chief of Staff General Saad Mohamed el-Husseiny Shazli. He also renamed and partly reorganized the GID. He also named former EGIS

99 Sirrs, 120.
100 Handel, 246.
101 Binder, 390.
102 Handel, 248. A year later, Sadat replaced Sadiq with General Ahmed Ismail after Sadiq slow-rolled and then opposed Sadat’s plan to prepare Egyptian forces for war because he did not believe Sadat’s concept of limited war would reap gains.
103 Handel, 248.
Director Mohamed Hafiz Isma’il to the new position of Adviser to the President for National Security Affairs in September 1971.  

Second, he sought closer Soviet support in order to preempt further Soviet intervention into Egyptian politics. Several weeks before the showdown, Sadat had personally informed the Soviet Ambassador that his impending action against Sabri should not be seen as an anti-Soviet move. People “will tell you that the Soviet Union’s number one man in Egypt had been liquidated,” Sadat told the Russian. “The Western papers will dance in front of you with galgalas [castanets] trying to provoke you. But, I assure you, there is nothing directed against the Soviet Union in this. It is a purely internal dispute. If anyone suggests to you that what I am going to do is directed against the Soviet presence in Egypt you can tell them that I would be delighted if you would intensify your presence.” Furthermore, Sadat had messaged Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, indicating his interest in an even closer, treaty-bound relationship with the Soviets. Two days after Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny arrived in Cairo, the two countries signed a fifteen-year treaty of friendship and cooperation, including a clause calling for party-to-party cooperation. Over two decades after the first Soviet arms shipment to Egypt, the two countries inked a formal alliance agreement for the first time. 

Ironically, Sadat forged a closer bond with the Soviet Union in order to later untangle Egypt from that very alliance. Until he had consolidated his power and stopped fearing internal challenges to his rule, he needed to neutralize Soviet involvement in

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104 Sirrs, 121.
105 Sadat quoted in Heikal, 128-129.
106 Handel, 246-247. The Treaty was subsequently signed on May 27th, the first formal alliance between the two countries. Handel notes that Sadat states in his memoirs that the treaty was a Soviet idea and he was opposed, whereas Heikal espouses the view that it was Sadat’s initiative.
107 Binder, 394.
Egyptian politics. By signing a formal treaty with Moscow—an costly symbol of loyalty—Sadat slyly reassured Egypt’s patron that his domestic actions would not affect Egypt’s external policies.

Finally, Sadat sought to purge regime institutions, particularly the ASU and the National Assembly, of indoctrinated Nasserites. Having failed to do so through fresh elections—most people were simply reelected to their existing positions—he diluted the faction’s power through a mix of presidential appointments and restrictive rules. For the ASU, he personally selected Central Committee members, appointed the provincial and district secretaries as well as the bureau directors, and abolished the office of the secretary-general. In National Assembly elections, he mandated that there be no official ASU candidates, that no one could be a member of both an ASU local council and the Assembly simultaneously, and even threatened to strip them of their ASU posts if they ran and lost. When the final election for the Assembly took place in November 1971, fifty percent of the new representatives had never been more than a member of an ASU basic unit committee and thirty percent had never held a post whatsoever. Through these actions, Sadat had purged the ASU, especially its leadership, of Nasserite rivals and prevented them from controlling the National Assembly.

Sadat also sought popular support for his consolidation of power through highly symbolic actions. He publicly incinerated the Ministry of the Interior’s surveillance tapes, closed detention centers, and declared an end to arbitrary arrests. In late August, the ninety-one supposed “conspirators” were put on trial. When the verdicts were announced in December, Guma’a, Sharaf, and Sabri received death sentences, which were

108 Binder, 394-395.
109 Brownlee, 19.
commuted to life in prison. As Sirrs concludes, “with these sentences all domestic opposition to the Sadat presidency had been effectively crushed for the moment.”\textsuperscript{110} A new constitution adopted in September 1971 granted the presidency far more sweeping powers.

\textit{Regime Cohesion Achieved}

When he unexpectedly assumed power in September 1970, Sadat was supremely aware of his perilous political position. He was a compromise candidate meant to be a puppet at best, a seat warmer at worst. His interest in exploring new alignment options—opposed both by his Soviet patron and his regime rivals—took a backseat until he had consolidated his own power. His peace feelers, with both the United States and Israel, were hardly bold, yet caused him distress nonetheless. Anything more forward would have risked being exploited by Sabri or others in order to remove Sadat from power. As long as the dominant threat to his rule remained from within, his alignment decisions would remain beholden to what was needed for his own political survival.

A year later, Sadat and the regime were one and the same. First, he eliminated his major political rival in a high-stakes showdown. Second, he replaced the commanders in the armed services, the intelligence directorate, and the internal security services with loyalists.\textsuperscript{111} Third, he redesigned party and state political institutions to purge any remaining Nasserites who might challenge his rule. By late 1971, Sadat had achieved a monopoly on political decision-making and could pursue controversial policies without

\textsuperscript{110} Sirrs, 120.

\textsuperscript{111} A year later, in October 1972, he fired Minister of War Sadiq and MID Director Mihriz Mustafa Abd al-Rahman after EGIS Chief Ahmed Isma’il had warned him that Moscow was grooming Sadiq to be his replacement. Sirrs, 126.
fear of being toppled or worse. By temporarily reinforcing Egypt’s alignment with the Soviet Union, he also ensured that Moscow abstain from meddling. Egypt’s “victory” in the 1973 war would make Sadat’s decisions beyond reproach.

Yet, 1971 and early 1972 saw no alignment flip. Soviet-Egyptian interests were diverging and relations were becoming strained, but Moscow still remained Egypt’s sole arms provider, diplomatic defender, and financial patron. Moscow was continuing to fulfill its end of the bargain, even if Egypt felt more could be done. Moreover, Egypt’s relations with the United States were still non-existent. For the moment, Egypt’s alliance was still fairly cohesive.

*A Fraying Alliance*

Nasser’s death and Sadat’s assumption of power occurred at a pivotal moment in the Soviet-Egyptian relationship. Following its catastrophic defeat in the 1967 war, Egypt was in dire straights. Its military forces had been devastated. Israel not only controlled the entire Sinai Peninsula, including its lucrative oil fields, but the Suez Canal also remained closed to traffic after Nasser had mined the waterway and scuttled ships during the war. Having lost two key sources of revenue overnight, the Egyptian economy was in ruins, and yet, still maintained sky-high military spending.\(^{112}\) In desperation, Cairo turned to Moscow for emergency support. Egypt sought Soviet arms and training to rebuild its shattered military as well as economic relief to help it weather the difficult period. Already a client state, Egypt’s precarious situation only drew it closer to its Soviet patron.

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\(^{112}\) For an overview of the disastrous economic impact of Egypt’s defeat, see E. Kanovsky, “The Economic Aftermath of the Six Day War,” *Middle East Journal* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1968): 135-140.
The 1967 war also put Moscow in a bind. Due to the lightning loss by its two major proxies, Soviet prestige had suffered greatly and Moscow desperately needed to reverse the perception. However, it was wary of recreating the pre-1967 conditions that had emboldened Egypt to seek a fight it could not win. On the one hand, Moscow needed to rebuild Egypt in order to reassert its regional position and reassure other allies. On the other hand, it sought to temper Egyptian expectations about Soviet support for further self-defeating actions, such as seeking to reverse Israeli gains through military means. The aforementioned episode of Soviet pilots defending Egyptian skies during the War of Attrition aptly symbolized the situation: Moscow had doubled-down on its commitment to defend Egypt, but it would keep its hand on the steering wheel. For the first time, their interests were diverging, but the development was not yet affecting their alliance obligations.

An immediate post-war June 1967 visit to Cairo by Podgorny and the Soviet Army Chief of Staff did not go well. First, the Soviets were incensed that Israel had captured some of their most sophisticated arms and duly passed them onto the United States. Second, the delegation scoffed at the excessive Egyptian armament demands. Still bitter at Israeli aerial superiority, Cairo complained about the limited range of MiGs and Sukhois and wanted long-range fighters. When Podgorny defended the Soviet planes, Nasser sarcastically suggested “to leave the entire air defence of Egypt to the Soviet Union.”³¹³ Lastly, while Nasser was willing to grant a command post in Alexandria for the Soviet fleet, he exploded when Podgorny requested that the facility be guarded by

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³¹³ Heikal, 47.
Soviet troops and that it fly under the Soviet flag. “This is just imperialism,” Nasser thundered, and “it means we shall be giving you a base.”

Podgorny backed down, but the damage had been done. Moscow was frustrated with Cairo’s military ineptitude, while Cairo was bitter at Moscow’s unwillingness to correct it. Already unbalanced, the alliance was becoming more asymmetric as Egypt increasingly had little choice but to rely more and more on Soviet strength. Egypt was still a close Soviet proxy, but not a satisfied one.

Even as the Soviet-Egyptian relationship ostensibly tightened, Nasser remained prickly about just how far Egypt would bend. While the arrival of Soviet military advisers—one assigned to each brigade commander—produced some friction, Nasser insisted it was necessary to remodel the Egyptian army after such a humiliating defeat.

In addition to opposing giving the Soviets full control of their naval facilities, he also resisted letting the Soviet Air Force overfly Egyptian territory or use Egyptian airfields without prior notice. As Nasser confidante Mohamed Heikal wrote, “it was a difficult tightrope to walk, but he managed it.”

A Nasser-Brezhnev meeting in Moscow in late January 1970 ended similarly. Nasser had complained that the Soviet-provided SAM-2s were insufficient to deter Israeli aerial raids. However, when Brezhnev agreed to supply him with the superior SAM-3s, Nasser requested that he send Soviet crews along with them since Egyptian crews were not trained on the new systems. Brezhnev demurred, saying to do so he would also have to send Soviet planes, at which point Nasser asked for those as well. Brezhnev said this would be a radical step. Nasser openly complained “why is it the Americans can always

114 Heikal, 48.
115 Heikal, 51.
116 Heikal, 166.
escalate their support whereas we sometimes behave as if we were scared.” As the exchange became more heated, Nasser threatened to resign unless he got what he needed, saying someone else could surrender Egypt to the United States. In the end, the Politburo agreed to Nasser’s demands to send not only the SAM-3s and their crews, but 80 MiG-25s as well.117 Three months later, Israeli planes were encountering Soviet pilots over Egyptian skies.

At first, these tensions were imperceptible to the United States, who only could see the outcome, not the deliberations. In early 1969, the State Department had concluded that Moscow had “established strong—but not ‘dominant’” positions in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, substantially replaced destroyed or captured military equipment, and increased the number of military advisers. Moreover, “the Soviet Navy has been allowed greater use of Egyptian ports and repair facilities, and a small number of Soviet aircraft (with Egyptian markings) have been conducting reconnaissance operations over the Sixth Fleet.”118 To American eyes, Egypt had willingly and eagerly welcomed a far more intrusive Soviet presence.

As the Nixon Administration tested Soviet interest in relaxing global tensions, it began to understand the regional trickle down effects. The beginning of an American exploitation strategy appeared in a lengthy December 1969 report on Soviet Middle East policy, authored by Secretary of State William Rogers. “Two immediate Soviet considerations emerge as overriding.” Rogers assessed, “(a) perpetuation of friendly radical Arab regimes, above all the Nasser regime in the [United Arab Republic], and (b)

117 Heikal, 84-88.
avoidance of a confrontation with the United States. These considerations require Soviet caution and in particular arouse an aversion to the outbreak of another round of Arab-Israeli hostilities.” While Moscow had rushed to replace Arab arms losses from June 1967, it was careful not to unhinge the Arab-Israeli military balance in order to prevent its clients from sparking another unwinnable conflict. Instead, the Soviets would prefer a “controlled tension,” something “between the extremes of continuing military engagement and genuine peace.” Moscow had “the dilemma of not wanting to antagonize Nasser while at the same time wanting to save him.” Washington was beginning to understand that Egypt was unhappy with its Soviet patron, as the deviating interests of the two allies were impacting the balance of obligations within the alliance.

A National Intelligence Estimate three months later reached an identical conclusion:

The Arab-Israeli conflict provides the Soviets with their greatest means of leverage in the Middle East, but it also faces them with the most severe complications. They have extended enough military aid to the radical Arabs to become thoroughly involved in the latters’ cause, but their efforts have not created an effective Arab defense. Israeli military attacks, particularly against Egypt, intensify this Soviet dilemma. They wish to provide Egypt with effective defense, but seek also to minimize the risks of direct involvement; yet if they sought to defuse the situation by pressing the Arabs to make concessions to Israel, they would jeopardize their influence in the Arab world. Barring a de-escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Soviets will probably step up their aid to the Egyptians, and they may provide new weapons systems and additional personnel to improve Egyptian air defenses.120

119 Airgram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, December 17, 1969, 7:05 p.m, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969-1972; Jordan, September 1970, Document 16, 49-55. Despite the insightful analysis, Rogers miscalculated when he added that the Soviets might even welcome improved American-Arab ties: “Any resulting US economic aid to these states could relieve some of the burden on the USSR (as do current contributions to the UAR from Libya, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia), while leaving the arms monopoly in Soviet hands. US-Arab ties would therefore not infringe significantly on Soviet influence, particularly as they would not involve any greater US willingness to support the Arab radicals politically.”

By the time the War of Attrition had reached full strength, Washington was well aware of the diverging—yet still broadly overlapping—interests of Egypt and the Soviet Union.

As one historian wrote, “no country stood to lose more in post-Nasser Egypt than the USSR.”\(^{121}\) Soviet dominance of Egypt was nearly complete; at the Cairo airport, Soviet planes could take off and land as they pleased without even passing through Egyptian customs.\(^{122}\) When Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin arrived in Cairo for Nasser’s funeral, he urged Sadat to be open and forthcoming with him, just as Nasser had been.\(^{123}\) Aware of a supposed backchannel Sadat had with the Americans, the Soviets were wary of the new president’s instincts and maintained their own secret contacts with Sadat’s political rivals.\(^{124}\) Even though they were shocked by Sadat’s “Corrective Revolution”—as the May 1971 purge became known—they were reassured by Sadat’s immediate desire to sign a formal alliance treaty and his pledge to continue Nasser’s policies. Sadat was willing to bind Egypt further to its existing ally—even as it was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with it—in order to first consolidate domestic political control.

Initial contacts between Sadat and the Nixon Administration did not yield any breakthroughs. In a meeting with an American delegation after Nasser’s funeral, Sadat stressed his positive feelings towards the U.S. and added that relations could become quite close, if the Israel issue were resolved.\(^{125}\) In a letter to Sadat, Nixon implored the

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121 Sirrs, 123.
122 Heikal, 166-167.
123 Sirrs, 123.
124 Sirrs, 124.
new Egyptian leader to continue his predecessor’s efforts at a resolution. One month later, Sadat responded that “it had long been [Nasser’s] view, and likewise has been ours, that the achievement of all these objectives could be brought about through closer relations with the people and Government of the United States.” He continued, “I wish to assure you, dear President, that the state of relations between our two countries does not please us at all. We wish it were better” and “I hope that some day we may have the opportunity to exchange views on issues of mutual concern to us, particularly those that have a direct bearing on relations between our two countries.”

At a Christmas Eve meeting with Donald Bergus, the director of the U.S. Interests Section in Cairo, Sadat repeatedly tried to devalue Egypt’s closeness to the Soviet Union. Egypt was desperate, Sadat noted, and the Kremlin was the sole power willing to help. Naturally, the Soviets demanded something in return, but Sadat assured Bergus that Egypt had no interest in promoting a Soviet-American clash in the Middle East. As Bergus concluded, “I think it possible that with plenty of patience and a dash of style and finesse we can do business with this guy. He is so obviously reaching out for some kind of encouragement from President Nixon, despite much of what he says.”

A few months after Sadat’s ascension, Washington was well aware that a flip opportunity existed. The Nixon Administration knew that the Soviet-Egyptian relationship was tense and that Sadat sought a better rapport with the United States.

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However, it also assessed that Sadat was weak and in no position to deliver such a geopolitical feat. Egypt’s alignment and regime were disjointed. While the former provided a flipping opportunity, the latter blocked it.

Nevertheless, Sadat’s first order of business remained the procurement of additional Soviet military aid and arms. In particular, Egypt sought MiG-25 fighter aircraft, which had just entered service in 1970, Scud ballistic missiles, as well as large quantities of SAM-3, SAM-6, and air-to-ground missiles. Moscow balked at providing Egypt such advanced weaponry. Not only had these systems never been afforded to Warsaw Pact countries, but Egypt’s prior military performance also discouraged the U.S.S.R. from bestowing such equipment for fear of another embarrassment. If the Soviet regional position was weakened by Egypt’s last defeat, the consequences of a second defeat, this time while revealing the shortcomings of its latest technological military advances, would be permanent. The Soviets were determined to help Sadat, but to also maintain control of their assets.

In response to Sadat’s requests, the Soviets agreed to station their latest equipment in Egypt on the condition that Soviet crews operated them. Soviet pilots—in MiG-25s—were soon patrolling Egyptian skies and Soviet crews were soon operating SAM missile batteries. Yet, Sadat was not placated. In a secret March 1971 visit to Moscow, he berated his hosts, rejecting a Soviet offer to train Egyptian pilots on Soviet-provided aircraft as long as Egypt agreed to ask for Soviet permission to use them.

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129 Handel, 268.
130 Handel, 268-269.
131 Handel, 269.
132 Handel, 269.
Following Sadat’s outburst, Brezhnev promised him 30 MiG-25s, but never delivered them.\footnote{Handel, 269-270.}

As 1971 wore on, Soviet-Egyptian relations chaffed. While Sadat tussled with Soviet leadership over empty promises, tensions between the Egyptian Army and the thousands of Soviet advisers stationed in Egypt grew. Egyptians, both civilian and military, “were offended by the arrogant and patronizing Soviet attitude.”\footnote{Handel, 271.} Sadat’s purge of Nasser loyalists from regime institutions also had the effect of severing routine contact between the two countries’ intelligence agencies.\footnote{Sirrs, 124.} Despite all of this, in an October 1971 visit to the Soviet Union, Sadat reassured Moscow that Soviet-Egyptian friendship was not a matter of tactics, but of strategy.\footnote{Handel, 247.} A subsequent February 1972 meeting also did not go well. Sadat demanded more arms, while Brezhnev derided Egypt’s inability to suffer a blow and recover.\footnote{Heikal, 158-159.} Over the course of the early spring, the two establishments clashed over how Egypt would pay for arms, that Egypt was initially promised MiG-23s only to be changed to modified MiG-21s, and the replacement of Soviet battery crews with trained Egyptian ones.\footnote{Heikal, 162-163.}

While President Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger were cognizant of the tensions surrounding arms deliveries, the White House did little to exploit them because it believed the status quo was actually quite desirable. Soviet-Egyptian strains were exacerbating Egypt’s military impotence and Kissinger believed that this “would move the Arabs toward moderation and the Soviets to the fringes of
Middle East diplomacy.” Moreover, the White House saw Sadat as a weak, transitional figure that would soon make way for Sabri or some other strongman. In his memoirs, Kissinger later admitted being “baffled about his purposes; the gyrations that lulled Moscow about his real intentions also confused us.” As William Quandt, a Middle East staffer on both the Nixon and Carter National Security Council, later wrote, “The period of ‘standstill diplomacy’ from 1970 to 1973 will not go down in the annals of American foreign policy as one of the more enlightened.”

When Secretary of State Rogers visited Egypt in May 1971—the first such visit in nearly two decades—he made clear to Sadat that the large Soviet presence in Egypt remained a major obstacle to U.S.-Egyptian relations. In an October 3-4, 1971 interview with Le Monde, Sadat said he would negotiate directly with the Israelis if they pre-committed themselves to a full withdrawal from all territory captured in 1967 and that a firm American stance on issue would result in Soviet expulsion. That November, a close adviser of Saudi King Faisal visited Cairo and reinforced the American message. Sadat replied that he was extremely dependent on Russian support, but that “he could promise that he would get the Russians out” after the first phase of an Israeli territorial

140 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 201.
141 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 201.
143 Waterbury, 400.
withdrawal. In a June 1972 meeting, another Saudi envoy reiterated the American message: until the Soviets were out of Egypt, the U.S. would not pressure Israel.

The Shock of Détente

By early 1972, the alliance was falling apart. Egypt wanted a more aggressive policy towards Israel, while the Soviets cautioned restraint. Egypt demanded both greater and more advanced offensive weaponry, Moscow demurred and delayed, offering only defensive systems or offensive systems but under watchful Soviet control. Personal relations were also strained. However, the alliance continued because it was the best alternative either had: Cairo had no other arms supplier while Moscow needed to maintain its stake in the region. Absent an acute external shock that might finally snap the strains, the alliance seemed destined to sputter on, even as each side was increasingly unhappy.

Détente changed everything. The May 1972 Nixon-Brezhnev summit in Moscow had a cataclysmic effect on the Soviet-Egyptian alliance. In addition to signing several arms limitation agreements (the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty), the two superpowers also issued a joint statement detailing a series of cooperative measures across the globe. With regards to the Middle East, not only did the communiqué commit the Soviets to supporting a “peaceful settlement” among Arabs and

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144 Heikal, 119-120. If the commitment was meant to encouraged the Nixon Administration to press Israel for such a withdrawal, the move failed when it was exposed by Senator Henry Jackson in order to further sour Soviet-Egyptian relations.


146 Ironically, the summit itself had been brought about by Nixon’s opening to China, itself a flip. By exploiting the Sino-Soviet split and turning China into an anti-Soviet partner, the Nixon Administration had successfully applied pressure on Moscow to be more accommodating to its intended Détente policy. The flip of China ultimately paved the way for the flip of Egypt. See Chapter Three.
Israelis, but that “the achievement of such a settlement would open prospects for the normalization of the Middle East situation and would permit, in particular, consideration of further steps to bring about a military relaxation in that area.”\textsuperscript{147} Moscow was now theoretically committed to dousing rather than enflaming the Arab-Israeli conflict and, to that end, would not provide arms that could alter the status quo.

To Egyptian eyes, the statement, and the policy it represented, was a betrayal. After years of goosing Egypt and her policy of military confrontation with the Israelis, the Soviets now reversed course and committed themselves to restraint, essentially freezing the status quo. Since Israeli forces remained parked on the Suez Canal, the status quo was unacceptable to Egypt. For five years, Nasser and Sadat had assumed that Moscow and Cairo were working together to apply military pressure on Israel to eventually force an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai. Détente, and its accompanying policies, meant Moscow would no longer fulfill its political and military obligations. The alliance was meaningless—dead in all but name.

The end of meaningful Soviet arms sales immediately crippled Egypt’s military position vis-à-vis Israel. The unveiling of Détente codified what Sadat, and Nasser before him, had feared for several years: Moscow would not help Egypt recoup its territory through war. With the Soviet pledge of a “military relaxation” in force, Egypt’s armed forces, still reeling from its 1967 defeat, now had no prospects of being seriously rebuilt. Meanwhile, Israel, as a result of its victory in 1967, was quickly incorporating American weaponry as it began receiving direct American military aid. The balance of power, already in Israel’s favor, was accelerating. Continued failure to deliver promised arms

was not a series of unfortunate events, but a deliberate Soviet policy to prevent Egypt from quixotic military adventures. Egypt was in a vise and until it could figure out how to escape, Sadat continued to send supportive signals to the Soviets, including letters affirming the strong nature of ties.¹⁴⁸

In sum, the Soviet-Egyptian alliance had entered its third and final phase. Prior to 1967, Egyptian and Soviet interests were perfectly aligned and their alliance was incredibly cohesive. Moscow provided Egypt with massive financial, diplomatic, and military support while Egypt advanced Soviet policies in the region. From 1967-1972, the interests of both sides were diverging, but each side was still broadly meeting its alliance obligations, albeit while grumbling. Egypt was feeling entrapped, hemorrhaging its political autonomy in service of its defense patron, but remained committed to the alliance due to a lack of alternatives. After 1972, Moscow’s political interests dictated that it would no longer observe the unwritten terms of its commitment to Egypt. The Kremlin was not only constraining Egypt’s policies, but it was now also refusing to strengthen her security. A once robust alliance had become a political and military burden.

**Sadat’s Options**

In the aftermath of the May summit, Sadat had few options for Moscow maintained significant leverage. 15,000-20,000 Soviet advisers were stationed in Egypt and Moscow remained Cairo’s sole military provider.¹⁴⁹ Between 1955-1970, the U.S.S.R. had provided Egypt with $4.5 billion in military assistance, by far its biggest

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¹⁴⁸ Handel, 272.
¹⁴⁹ Handel, 270.
client in the Middle East. American-Egyptian relations were non-existent. Each day Israeli forces sat on the Canal was another reminder of Egypt’s weakness.

Troubled by the predicament, Sadat sought to reestablish leverage with the Soviets while searching for other alternatives. In a July 8th meeting with the Soviet ambassador, Sadat demanded that the Soviet Union withdraw all military personnel and equipment stationed in Egypt. Moscow was shocked by the move, but faithfully and efficiently carried out the withdrawal by the one-week deadline. They also removed 120 MiG-21s, 20 Sukhoi-11s, all MiG-25s, and perhaps as many as 260 SAM-3s as well as some SAM-4s and SAM-6s and a squadron of TU-16 maritime reconnaissance aircraft. Three days later, on July 18th, Sadat announced the move in a long speech before the ASU. American media picked up what seemed to be a major development.

Although Sadat’s move clearly indicated a crisis in the Soviet-Egyptian relationship, Washington’s reaction was surprisingly tepid. The White House was clearly satisfied by Moscow’s agreement to freeze the Arab-Israeli conflict and ebullient at Sadat’s seemingly major public rift with the Kremlin, the supposed sine qua non of a renewed relationship with the U.S. Indeed, a secret channel between Sadat and Kissinger, which had existed for several years, was immediately reactivated that July. However, Sadat’s move did not actually sever the alliance. Despite the expulsion, the Soviet navy was still using Egyptian bases and Sadat had not sought American support for the move,

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150 Pedro Ramet, *Sadat and the Kremlin* (Santa Monica, CA: California Seminar on Arms Control and Foreign Policy, 1980), Student Paper No. 85, 29. Waterbury says the figure is $5 billion. Waterbury, 31.
151 Handel, 273.
152 Handel, 274.
153 Ramet, 6.
155 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 205.
a non-act that confused Kissinger.\textsuperscript{156} For the moment, Sadat was still keen on restoring Egyptian prestige through limited military victory \textit{before} making a move to cut Soviet ties.\textsuperscript{157}

Moscow’s reaction was predictable: all arms deliveries stopped. As they withdrew, the Soviets even removed critical parts of the advanced air defense systems, leaving Egypt defenseless to the type of attacks that had preceded the War of Attrition.\textsuperscript{158} However, the situation became so precarious that numerous Soviet advisers returned to Egypt in October to man the air defense system after both sides realized how exposed Egypt had become.

After a few months, however, Sadat’s gambit seemed to produce results. The Soviets not only resumed arms deliveries, but they also delivered more arms to Egypt in the first six months of 1973 than in the previous two years combined.\textsuperscript{159} In particular, the Egyptian Air Force and Air Defense Forces received major upgrades. The Tupolev Tu-16 bomber force was beefed up and Egypt received a few of the latest Sukhoi Su-20 ground attack aircraft. Moscow even transferred certain aircraft from other Middle Eastern client states to Egypt. Egypt also received the latest anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery as well as 30 SCUD medium-range missiles. Egypt’s T-54/55 tank force was also replenished after the significant losses it suffered in 1967.\textsuperscript{160} In December 1972, Sadat unilaterally

\textsuperscript{156} Quandt speculates that Nixon purposefully avoided embroiling himself in any Middle East initiative, especially one that would involve pressuring Israel for concessions to Egypt, prior to his November 1972 reelection. Quandt, 96.
\textsuperscript{157} Handel, 276-277.
\textsuperscript{159} Handel, 277.
\textsuperscript{160} Ramet, 41.
extended by five years the agreement that granted Soviets access to Egyptian naval
facilities.\textsuperscript{161}

Even as the alliance continued bearing some fruit, a deep cleavage had emerged,
one that directly impinged on Egypt’s primary national security policy. Not only was
Moscow now unwilling to help Egypt regain its land through war, but it was also
incapable of brokering a negotiated solution. Without even basic diplomatic relations
with Israel, Moscow’s usefulness to Sadat had dramatically diminished. A “no peace, no
war” situation had become ideal for Moscow, but it was intolerable for Egypt. For Egypt,
the alliance’s \textit{raison d’être} was no longer valid.

Moreover, Egyptian and Soviet policies were no longer aligned elsewhere as well.
As the Soviets celebrated a communist coup in Sudan in July 1971, Sadat assisted the
deposed Sudanese president in regaining power days later, even signing mutual defense
also backed opposing sides in the wars in Chad, Angola, and in the Ogaden War between
Ethiopia and Somalia. In July 1977, despite the presence of Soviet military advisers in
Libya, Egypt even shot down several Libyan aircraft and destroyed Libyan tanks.\textsuperscript{162}
Egypt was literally at war with another Soviet proxy.

Meanwhile, direct senior level talks with the Americans finally commenced.
Secret U.S.-Egyptian talks had been first suggested in April 1972, but Sadat demurred.
Kissinger renewed the idea after Sadat expelled the Soviets in July. While Sadat agreed
to them, they did not truly get off the ground until early 1973.\textsuperscript{163} When Egyptian

\textsuperscript{161} Ramet, 40.
\textsuperscript{162} Ramet, 36-37.
Presidential Adviser for National Security Affairs Hafiz Ismail responded to Kissinger’s invite for a meeting in late February, he said that “Egypt, in making this contact with the US Government, is acting independently and is considering Egyptian national interests within the general framework of Arab interests. For a long time Egypt has shouldered the responsibility for the independence and development of Arab countries. In the future Egypt sees itself as a partner in the Arab community of states. Egypt believes that a good settlement is one that is defensible both with Egyptian public opinion and Arab public opinion...Egypt appreciates the constructive attitude shown by the US Government.”

Ismail was indicating to Kissinger that Egypt was no longer a Soviet appendage and would be receptive to changing alignments.

During the meeting, Ismail expounded on Egypt’s interest in a new relationship with the United States. Nixon made clear he wanted to normalize relations with Egypt and “announced as his goal that Egypt and the United States be friends.” Ismail wanted Egypt’s relationship with the superpowers to “be balanced” and “he emphasized that Egypt makes its decisions in Cairo and that it was not a satellite of any country and intended to remain that way—and on good terms with all.” Ismail affirmed that “the President’s meeting in Moscow and Egypt’s termination of the Soviet military presence in Egypt provided a basis for Egypt to normalize relations with the U.S. He felt that Egypt was now in a correct position for steps to be taken by the U.S. He observed that for 15 years Egypt and the U.S. had not seen eye to eye.” “The time has come,” Ismail said, “when the United States and Egypt should start improved relations. Egypt is not hostile to the United States, and he hopes that the U.S. is not hostile to Egypt.” Having ejected the

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Soviets, Egypt was “now in a position to be receptive toward movement by the U.S. in the direction of Egypt.” When Kissinger met again with Ismail in France three months later, Ismail pleaded for a new beginning with the United States. He insisted that “Egypt is not tied by any commitment to any foreign powers” and that “after July ’72 with the withdrawal of the Soviet military elements from Egypt, to correspond with and to respond to such a move the United States might start a new approach to this question of balance of power not desireable[sic] up to now.” Sadat’s confidante explicitly told Nixon that Egypt was no longer aligned with Moscow and was keenly interested in binding itself to Washington.

As the summer wore on, Nixon and Kissinger were not able to translate Egypt’s desire for a better relationship with the U.S. and obvious frustration with its alliance with Moscow into an alignment flip. A June 1973 CIA report noted “Egyptian bitterness” with Moscow, but that both countries “have an interest in preventing any further deterioration in relations.” Moscow had sharply limited arms deliveries, but “Egypt remains the political center of gravity of the Arab world and the leading state in the confrontation with Israel. The Soviets cannot abandon the Sadat regime without damaging their relations throughout the Arab world.” Similarly, Egypt has no choice but to swallow the new reality, even as “current Soviet military deliveries appear designed to maintain Cairo’s arms inventories rather than to introduce new weapons systems.” In the eleven months since the expulsion, “only seven MIG–21s, 15 SU–17 fighter bombers, and two helicopters have been delivered.” Yet, Egypt had no other military or political patron.

“Sadat’s standing with the Kremlin was near zero” and “the progress of US–Soviet trade negotiations, the suspension of the emigration tax, the coming Brezhnev visit, all have grated on Egyptian sensitivities,” but no recourse existed. Cairo, the report concluded, “wants a sponsor which will take decisive action—toward peace or war—that will recover Arab territory” and it was realizing the Soviets were not it.\textsuperscript{167} Kissinger also noted the Soviet conundrum: “If Israeli forces begin to defeat the Arabs, would the USSR help? If so, what are the risks of confrontation with the US? This latter fear inspires Brezhnev to want some tangible sign of progress toward a peace settlement.”\textsuperscript{168}

\textit{The 1973 War: Crucible to the Flip}

By mid-1973, Egypt was in a catch-22. It had downgraded its relationship with Moscow and explicitly sought to upgrade its relationship with Washington. The Soviet-Egyptian alliance was fractured beyond repair, yet Egypt remained dependent on Soviet arms and largesse—however constrained. Washington was either incapable or unwilling to simply replace Moscow as Sadat’s benefactor merely in return for Egypt’s defection from the Soviet orbit. Sadat would need to make a moderating move towards Israel for the Nixon Administration to reward him. However, doing so would not only raise alarm bells in Moscow, but it could also undermine his standing at home. Sadat needed a way to strengthen his hand, both against domestic opponents and his Soviet patron.


\textsuperscript{168} Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, June 14, 1973, \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976 Volume XXV, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973}, Document 70, 204-207.
Sadat’s surprise military assault, coordinated with Syria, on Israel in October 1973 had a massive effect on the puttering Soviet-Egyptian alliance. Although Moscow had failed to stop Sadat’s machinations—Sadat informed the Soviets of the attack only days before—it had no choice but to support its client state lest it lose face in the region. Within days, a massive maritime and aerial resupply mission was underway.

Egypt’s offensive had blindsided Kissinger, now Secretary of State, but he quickly eyed a flipping opportunity. A day into the war, Sadat messaged Kissinger detailing Egypt’s terms for a settlement. While the content of the note was a non-starter, Kissinger recognized that “Sadat was inviting us to participate in, if not take charge of, the peace process, despite the fact that at the UN we were advocating that he give up territory that he considered his own and that his armies had just captured.” By following through on his commitment to not expand the war, Sadat signaled that his military and political objectives were different—and that there was room for a negotiation. In return, the United States brokered a ceasefire that allowed Egypt to maintain a beachhead across the Canal as Israeli and Egyptian military negotiators met in the early hours of October 28th—the first such contact in almost a quarter century. Cognizant that Washington had now inserted itself directly into the Soviet-Egyptian relationship, Moscow slow-rolled the replenishment of Egyptian arms while immediately

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169 For the best historical account of the war itself, see Abraham Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Shocken Books, 2004).
171 Sadat met with the Soviet Ambassador several hours before the war began and accused him of evacuating Soviet civilians while not bringing planes loaded with military equipment. Heikal, 38.
172 Ramet, 41.
173 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 481-482.
restocking Syria and used its more aggressive clients, such as Libya or the Palestine Liberation Organization, to pressure Sadat.\textsuperscript{174} Moscow pointedly told Sadat not to cooperate with Kissinger.\textsuperscript{175}

Days after the war ended, Kissinger arrived in Cairo—his first ever visit to an Arab country—ending a nearly two-decade estrangement between the two countries.\textsuperscript{176} After his first meeting with Sadat, the American Secretary of State concluded that the Egyptian leader “was determined to end Nasser’s legacy. He would reestablish relations with the United States as quickly as possible and, once that was accomplished, he would move to friendship.”\textsuperscript{177} Sadat told him he understood any Israeli withdrawal would have to be gradual and that Egypt was not dependent on the maximalist Arab positions.\textsuperscript{178} The meeting was a “breakthrough,” Kissinger wrote. “Sadat had clearly staked his policy on the American connection; if we pursued that strategy wisely, it would become increasingly difficult for him to reverse course.”\textsuperscript{179} When Kissinger returned for a second meeting a month later, Sadat complained about the Soviets, but explained that he still needed their assistance, particularly arms deliveries, especially since the U.S. was in no position to sell him anything until there had been tangible diplomatic achievements.\textsuperscript{180} Through American mediation, Egypt and Israel signed a disengagement of forces agreement on January 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1974 and implemented it on February 21\textsuperscript{st}. Diplomatic relations between the United States and Egypt were formally reestablished one week

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{174}Sella, 37-39.
\bibitem{175}Ramet, 42.
\bibitem{176}Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, 616.
\bibitem{177}Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, 640.
\bibitem{178}Gardner, 134.
\bibitem{179}Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, 644.
\bibitem{180}Gardner, 135.
\end{thebibliography}
later, nearly seven years after they were severed, marking Egypt’s first formal step towards an alignment flip.

The restoration of ties also launched intelligence and security cooperation between the two allies. CIA contract employees began training Sadat’s personal bodyguards and a new counterterrorism unit, while CIA officers briefed Sadat on regional threats. According to one report, the CIA helped Egypt’s mukhabarat increase its telephone-tapping capabilities from 1,200 lines in 1971 to 16,000 lines by the late 1970s. In return, EGIS helped CIA collect intelligence on Libya.\(^{181}\) Egypt later joined the “Safari Club,” a French-led group of Iran, Saudi, and Moroccan intelligence agencies; Cairo soon became its base.\(^{182}\)

Meanwhile, the Soviet-Egyptian alliance was in free-fall. When Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko visited soon thereafter, he blasted Egypt for cooperating with Washington and ignoring Moscow. The Soviets soon downgraded their ambassadorial post in Cairo, replacing someone with the rank of deputy foreign minister with a junior diplomat. In March 1974, Sadat even signed an agreement with Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito to establish a joint arms industry in Egypt with Yugoslav knowhow and Arab oil money.\(^{183}\) In an early April speech in Alexandria, Sadat revealed details of the 1971-72 deterioration of ties, ensuring that Egypt was dead-set on its improving relationship with the United States.\(^{184}\) In mid-April, Sadat, at a joint session of the ASU Central Committee and the People’s Assembly, announced that he intended to end Egypt’s

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\(^{181}\) Sirrs, 137.  
\(^{182}\) Sirrs, 137.  
\(^{183}\) Ramet, 43.  
exclusive reliance on Soviet arms and diversify Egypt’s providers, a massive break from past policy.\textsuperscript{185} The Soviets immediately halted shipments in response. Although they were restored several weeks later, the stop-and-start maneuvering continued throughout the year as Moscow sought to coerce Sadat before the relationship with Washington had taken a permanent turn.\textsuperscript{186}

The resumption of diplomatic relations and Sadat’s public pledge to look beyond Moscow for arms further advanced the alignment flip. In June, Nixon, soon to resign over the Watergate scandal, visited Egypt, becoming the first American president to do so in nearly three decades.\textsuperscript{187} The two leaders signed the “Principles of Relations and Cooperation Between Egypt and the United States,” which established a Joint Cooperation Commission and promised the provision of peaceful nuclear technology to Egypt.\textsuperscript{188} Nixon proposed to sell Sadat $180 million worth of weaponry, but his resignation curtailed that possibility.\textsuperscript{189} Although Egypt still wanted Moscow to continue selling it arms—after all, Egyptian defense spending totaled $6.1 billion in 1975, more than half of its GDP\textsuperscript{190}—Egypt was no longer aligned with Soviet policies of any sort. Sadat had made clear that if the United States were to provide Egypt with the necessary arms, then Egypt could fully and irrevocably abandon its Soviet supplier.

\textsuperscript{185} Ro’i, 187.
\textsuperscript{186} Ramet, 44.
\textsuperscript{187} Roosevelt thrice visited Egypt during World War II. In November 1943, he convened the Cairo Conference with Churchill and Chiang Kai-Shek to conduct Allied strategy in Asia on his way to Tehran. In December 1943, he met again with Churchill and Turkish President Inonu upon his return from Tehran. In February 1945, on his way back from Yalta, he met Egypt’s King Farouk, Ethiopia’s Emperor Haile Selassie, Saudi Arabia’s King Ibn Saud, and Churchill on the Great Bitter Lake in the Suez Canal.
\textsuperscript{189} Brownlee, 22.
\textsuperscript{190} Brownlee, 24.
Continued Soviet recalcitrance turbo-charged Sadat’s drive to get out from under Moscow’s thumb. After a promised Brezhnev visit to Cairo in early 1975 was postponed, Sadat publicly griped about Moscow’s indifference to Egypt’s plight. The Soviets were not compensating wartime losses, were not fulfilling arms contracts, and were not providing enough advanced weaponry, specifically the MiG-23 fighter jet, the T-62 tank, and more ground-to-ground missiles. Moreover, even when Moscow had an opportunity to reclaim the initiative, such as when Kissinger initially failed to secure a second disengagement of forces agreement, it refused to accept Egyptian requests to postpone debt payment installments. Consequently, Sadat curbed Soviet access to Egyptian naval facilities. By July, it could only use the port of Alexandria and only with permission. Even Sadat’s minimum expectations of his one-time patron were not being met.

Understanding Sadat’s predicament, Kissinger wanted to complete Egypt’s flip by finally replacing Moscow as Egypt’s financial and military patron. In an August 1974 conversation with the new President Gerald Ford, Kissinger determined that “the Soviet Union is turning them off. If that continues, the military will have to turn out Sadat or go back to the Soviet Union.” The U.S. could continue to get other allies, such as Saudi Arabia or Jordan, to give Egypt some equipment, “but sooner or later we have to face up to it.” As Kissinger noted, “the thing we have going with the Arabs is that we deliver and we treat them gentler than the Soviet Union.” Ford concurred that it would be preferable for the U.S. to begin arming Egypt, if only to exercise a measure of control on Egyptian

191 Ro’i, 193. Ford begged Sadat to not let the momentary failure in negotiations lead to backtracking. He offered $250 million in economic support. Sadat acquiesced and the Second Disengagement Agreement was signed in September 1975. Brownlee, 22.
192 Sella, 56.
behavior, but there would be large Congressional and Israeli opposition. Yet, as Kissinger pointed out, “to cut Egypt off will certainly force Egypt back to the Soviet Union.”193 In another conversation with Ford two months later, Kissinger intoned that if Sadat cannot show more tangible benefits of his turn towards the United States, then “he will come under increasing pressure to re-establish some of the closer ties with the USSR, a development which I do not believe he desires but he would, in my judgment, move to if he concluded that it was the only course he had available to promote the national interests of Egypt.”194 In December, Kissinger advised Ford to give Egypt military aid if Sadat signs a second Egyptian-Israel disengagement agreement.195 Kissinger explicitly linked alliance cohesion to regime cohesion; if the United States could not supplant the Soviet Union’s former role, then Sadat could face internal challenges to his rule.

At a June 1975 meeting with Ford in Austria, Sadat pleaded his case. “Economic cooperation has stopped,” Sadat continued. “They want to paralyze me. The latest act is in Libya.” Sadat wanted the U.S. “to look at me as a friend… I want good relations with the United States. I will be very disappointed if nothing can be achieved.” As if he were not clear enough, he added that he wanted “the United States only to achieve it, not the Soviet Union, not through a Geneva Conference, where the USSR is sitting. The United States can achieve anything without the Soviet Union.” With bravado, Sadat concluded

that “we can achieve together a lot and we can save the Arab world from Soviet infiltration.” \(^{196}\)

Sadat beseeched Ford for financial relief, requesting $1.5 billion, as well as long-tenured loans, although much of it could come from the Arabs. Kissinger promised $500 million in aid for FY 1976 as well as help in getting Saudi Arabia, Iran, Germany, and Japan to pitch in. The Egyptian president added that after the interim agreement is achieved, he’ll also need to buy “defensive arms” from the U.S. for he was certain of “heading for a confrontation with the Soviets. The Soviets have never forgiven me for this—for being close to the United States.” \(^{197}\) The alliance quid pro quo became explicit: American arms and aid in return for a more cooperative Egyptian position on Israel.

After Egypt concluded its second disengagement agreement with Israel in September 1975, the Soviets again lambasted Sadat. \(^{198}\) Not only did the agreement provide for American-manned observation stations—a sly Egyptian proposal that inserted a symbolic American military presence in Egypt \(^{199}\)—but Kissinger also promised Sadat military aid. \(^{200}\) The agreement itself also provided an immediate financial boost: Egypt reclaimed some of its Sinai oil fields, generating about $1 billion annually, and reopened the Suez Canal to commercial traffic, whose tolls generated an additional $500 million

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\(^{198}\) Ramet, 45.


\(^{200}\) Ro’i, 195.
annually. Ford praised his counterpart, informing him that Congress seemed prime to approve $700 million in economic assistance as well as one million tons of grain under Public Law 480. Sadat’s gambit was producing results and he could now afford to shrug off Soviet criticisms. Whereas the first disengagement agreement had marked the first step towards the flip, the second disengagement agreement marked the beginning of a true alliance.

In late October 1975, Sadat made the first official state visit to the United States by an Egyptian leader. During that visit, he again pleaded for aid and arms, specifically for a squadron of F-5Es to replace the aging Soviet MiG-17s. Kissinger explained the Administration was favorable to the request, but that it could not do so until next year.

On November 5th, he addressed a joint session of Congress, an honor that had yet to be bestowed on an Israeli leader. As Kissinger wrote to Ford on the eve of Sadat’s visit, “the visit will dramatize the extraordinary change which has occurred since the October 1973 war not only in U.S.-Egyptian relations, but also in the U.S. position in the Middle East…Sadat has based his policy on the belief that peace in the Middle East on terms satisfactory to Egypt and the Arabs can be achieved in cooperation with us. We have an interest in seeing Sadat’s policy succeed. In the longer term, we hope to develop a relationship with Egypt that will endure beyond Sadat.”

Over the next seven years,

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201 Brownlee, 23.
204 Gardner, 112.
Egypt would purchase $6.6 billion in Western arms. A full two years before Sadat set foot in Israel, Egypt had fully flipped into the American orbit.

In March 1976, the Egyptian People’s Assembly, at Sadat’s behest, abrogated its alliance treaty with the Soviet Union in a near-unanimous vote, ignoring the one-year requirement of notice. Simultaneously, Sadat ended Soviet access to Egyptian ports. The Egyptian president had been particularly piqued by Moscow’s move to block India from selling spare parts to Egypt for its Soviet arms. The response from the Soviet media was unsparing: Sadat’s actions were compared to Hitler’s 1941 annulment of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact and invasion of the Soviet Union. The alliance was officially dead.

Washington quickly swooped in to become Egypt’s newest arms provider. The Ford Administration agreed to sell C-130 transport aircraft, six of which were delivered in 1976, and total U.S. aid to Egypt steadily grew, from $370 million in 1975, to $552 million in 1976, to $908 million in 1977. By comparison, the aid the United States provided to Egypt from 1974-1977 was more than double what it had provided in the previous twenty-eight years combined, $1.8 billion compared to $897 million.

Moscow quickly ended any remaining assistance to Egypt. Arms sales now necessitated payment in hard currency and then were ended altogether in June 1977. It even froze a pre-ordered Czechoslovakian tank deal and only returned fifty of the 150 MiG-21s Egypt had sent to it for refurbishment. With nothing to lose, Egypt suspended

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205 Gardner, 142.
206 Ramet, 45.
207 Ramet, 45.
208 Ro’i, 203.
209 Brownlee, 24.
210 Sharp, 24-25.
cotton shipments to both Moscow and Prague and finally broke off all trade relations in late August. In September, Sadat declared a ten-year moratorium on repaying the $4 billion it still owed Moscow.211

Although the flip was nearly complete, the Carter Administration nearly jeopardized Egypt’s geopolitical realignment by attempting to re-involve the Soviets in Arab-Israeli diplomacy.212 Upon assuming office, Carter revived the U.S.-Soviet sponsored Geneva process that Sadat had painstakingly convinced Nixon and Kissinger to jettison. When, with echoes of the May 1972 Détente statement, the superpowers issued a joint declaration on October 1st, 1977, Sadat knew he needed to shake the administration of its approach. The following month, in a move that truly shocked the world, he publicly and dramatically declared his intention to visit Jerusalem and address the Israeli Knesset himself. Even if Israel failed to meet his expectations, he would at the very least have earned additional credit in the eyes of Carter and ended the American president’s Soviet fantasies.213

After Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem, the Soviet-Egyptian relationship truly hit rock bottom. In response to vicious condemnation from Moscow and its satellites, Sadat shuttered Eastern bloc consulates and cultural centers in Egypt—although not quite relations with Moscow entirely.214 The Egyptian internal security services turned on Eastern bloc operatives working in the country. In March 1979, a Soviet military attaché was expelled for espionage. In September 1981, the Soviet ambassador and several other

211 Ramet, 47-48.  
213 Handel, 322. Egypt and Israel had also been conducting secret senior-level backchannel talks. Sadat knew that Israel would be more forthcoming if he negotiated with it directly rather than through the international process.  
214 Ramet, 49. Interestingly, China praised Sadat’s move.
Soviet and Hungarian diplomats were expelled after Egypt uncovered a spy ring intended to incite sectarian unrest.\textsuperscript{215}

Even as Egyptian-Israeli talks bogged down, Egypt’s flip to the United States continued apace. By January 1978, the U.S. had already helped Egypt maintain its Soviet MiGs, provided fourteen more C-130s, and begun an officer training program in the US, paid for with $200,000 of International Military Education and Training (IMET) for FY 1978. As part of an arms package for Israel and Saudi Arabia, the U.S. even sold fifty F-5Es to Egypt.\textsuperscript{216} From 1976-1979, the U.S. supplied Egypt with 350 gas grenade launchers, more than 150,000 gas grenades, over 2,400 hand guns, and 328,000 rounds of ammunition.\textsuperscript{217} Right before the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was signed in March 1979, the U.S. agreed that Israel would receive approximately $2.2 billion in military financial aid plus help for building new airfields in Israel while Egypt would get $1.5 billion in loans to finance procurement, starting an informal 3:2 ratio between the two.\textsuperscript{218} That summer, the U.S. sold Egypt several hundred air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles, 550 APCs, 12 batteries of improved Hawk air-defense missiles, and 35 F-4E Phantom fighter-bombers.\textsuperscript{219}

As the Soviet-Egyptian alliance became less cohesive, it provided greater opportunities for the United States to flip Egypt. Prior to 1967, Washington failed to drive any wedges in what was an incredibly cohesive Soviet-Egyptian relationship. The 1967 war caused Egyptian and Soviet interests to begin diverging, but Moscow continued to meet its alliance obligations, even as Egypt felt increasingly entrapped. By 1972, the

\textsuperscript{215} Sirrs, 138.
\textsuperscript{216} Brownlee, 30.
\textsuperscript{217} Brownlee, 27.
\textsuperscript{218} Brownlee, 36.
\textsuperscript{219} Brownlee, 36-37.
Soviet-Egyptian alliance was a shadow of its former self. When Soviet support for Détente had robbed the alliance of its function, Sadat sought to break away from his longstanding patron. By 1974, Egypt had become aligned with the United States, receiving aid and arms shortly thereafter. Egypt and the U.S.S.R. never shared strong ideational bonds and their alliance was not highly institutionalized. When Soviet and Egyptian interests began diverging, no institutional or bureaucratic mechanisms could keep the two sides together. Soviet arms in return for Egyptian allegiance was a loose, but powerful quid pro quo. When the arms ceased, so did the allegiance.

**Conclusion**

As historian Ken Stein wrote, “Anwar Sadat’s turn to the United States, perhaps, was the single greatest victory for the United States in the Cold War.” The Kremlin had lost its preeminent proxy in the Middle East without the United States firing a single shot. In a span of a few short years, Egypt flipped, transformed from an American adversary to an American ally.

While many point to the Camp David Accords as the turning point in Egypt’s geopolitical metamorphosis, Egypt had abandoned the Soviets and tethered itself to the United States several years before. Egypt expelled most Soviet advisers in 1972, announced it would diversify its arm suppliers in 1974, and formally abrogated its alliance with Moscow in 1976—all prior to Sadat’s journey to Jerusalem in November 1977. In parallel, Egypt and the United States reestablished diplomatic relations in 1974, capped by a historic visit to Egypt by Nixon that summer. Economic aid and arms sales

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soon followed. While the post-war disengagement agreements helped lubricate Egypt’s budding alignment with the United States, the flip had occurred prior to any major peace overture. As Stein wrote, “Sadat did not want peace with Israel. He needed an agreement with Israel, because he wanted to change Egypt’s direction.”

Egypt flipped to the United States for two primary reasons. First, by late 1971, the Egyptian regime had overcome the deep divisions of the year before and had become cohesive. Sadat had deftly outfoxed and then eliminated his political rivals, had installed loyalists in top security service positions, and had ousted Nasserites from the dominant political party and the parliament. By early 1972, Sadat could pursue his own policies without fear of domestic opposition, as he did when he expelled the Soviets advisers that summer. The political victory brought about by his initiation of the 1973 war also boosted his popular legitimacy, deterring future rivals from challenging his policies.

Second, the Soviet-Egyptian alliance had robust obligations, but few institutional mechanisms and little ideational convergence, leaving it prone to disintegration when obligations were unfulfilled. After 1967, Soviet and Egyptian interests began diverging, culminating in the explicit Soviet policy of Middle East restraint in 1972. When Moscow began curtailing its arms supplies and fiscal support, Egypt responded by curbing its own obligations, notably by ejecting Soviet military advisers from Egypt and restricting Soviet access to military facilities. Without a formal structure or common ideological outlook, the alliance quickly became disjointed once the arms for allegiance tradeoff dissipated.

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221 Were the Nixon and Ford Administrations not concerned with Congressional and Israeli reactions, it is plausible that they would have sold arms and offered substantial financial assistance to Egypt in 1974 or early 1975.

222 Stein, 79.
A cohesive regime and an un-cohesive alliance combined to produce the flip of Egypt. Facing little internal opposition and dissatisfied by its current alignment, the Egyptian regime was both able and interested in changing its geopolitical alignment. Egypt had achieved both statuses by mid-1972, which led to the first substantive contact between the Egyptian and American governments. Less than two years later, Egypt had exited the Soviet orbit and flipped into the American one.
Chapter Three: “We Have Now Become Tacit Allies”: Exploiting the Sino-Soviet Split

After a century of great fluctuations, today’s rivalry between China and the United States will determine the future of the Asia-Pacific if not the globe. China’s meteoric economic rise of the past thirty years will likely pose the most profound challenge to American hegemony. The parallel growth in China’s military capabilities has led the two powers to jostle over a variety of issues and in an array of arenas. The global competition, including for allies, between Washington and Beijing is in full swing as both have sought to woo the smaller states that lie between them.223

Yet, for a brief moment in history, America and China were actually allied. From 1971 until the end of the Cold War, the U.S. shared intelligence with China, sold military gear to China, and even offered to defend it against the Soviet Union. The United States also realigned much of its Asia policy along Chinese interests. It withdrew militarily from Southeast Asia, massively reduced its force deployment along the Asian littoral, abrogated its mutual defense pact with Taiwan, and backed China’s ally Pakistan against Soviet-supported India during a series of conflicts. Capped by President Nixon’s groundbreaking February 1972 trip—the first ever by a sitting American president—China flipped from being an American adversary to being an American ally.

China’s flip was a geopolitical coup and a pivotal development in the Cold War. It changed the balance of power in America’s favor, decreased the threat of guerilla,

conventional, and nuclear war, and pressured Moscow into a period of superpower Détente. It even served as a catalyzing example for other Soviet satellites, such as Egypt, to flip.\(^{224}\) When Détente unraveled a few years later, the Sino-American alignment allowed the United States to concentrate its military buildup solely against Soviet forces. As perhaps the most conspicuous and cogent example of how the defection of an ally can transform geopolitics, any study of why states flip must include China.

**Alternative Arguments Fall Short**

China’s flip may be Cold War lore, but its causes remain debated. The two dominant explanations for why China flipped—balancing against the threat of the Soviet Union and the Nixon Administration’s uniquely deft diplomacy—answer different questions. Fear of the Soviets and an outstretched hand from America were certainly both critical factors in revealing why Mao wanted to flip, but neither resolve why China was able to flip.\(^{225}\) The Soviet threat may have instigated China’s search for a new ally and American interest may have offered such an opportunity, but neither explanation actually answers the question as to how China managed to flip.

Structural realists attribute China’s alignment with the United States to its desire to balance against an increasingly threatening Soviet Union.\(^{226}\) Despite Stalin’s critical early support for Mao during the Chinese Civil War and the signing of an alliance treaty soon after its conclusion, relations quickly deteriorated. Nominally allied, the two

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225 Unless it is spelled differently in a primary source or refers to a specific proper noun at the time, this chapter employs the pinyin system for the spelling of Chinese words. For example, the Chinese capital is spelled Beijing when possible; it is spelled Peking or Peiping when taken from a primary source.

Communist powers clashed over who deserved to lead the Communist world after Stalin’s death, the nature, scope, and response to the American threat, and the disposition of Soviet military, financial, and technical assistance to China. These strains ultimately led the two countries to “split” in 1960 and clash militarily at the end of the decade. As the Soviet threat to China increased, Beijing’s interest in a friendlier relationship with the United States intensified. In a classic case of balancing against threats, the Sino-American partnership blossomed soon after the deadly 1969 Sino-Soviet border clashes.

China’s increasing discomfort under the glaring eye of Moscow undoubtedly prompted it to reevaluate its anti-American position, but it did not cause the flip. These factors—ideology, power, personality, and nationalism—were present from the outset of the relationship. Moreover, even as its alliance with Moscow was crumbling, Beijing did not moderate, but instead intensified its political and military support for Communist forces in Vietnam fighting Americans. Were China’s flip best explained by balance of threat theory, then not only would the 1950s and 1960s have been a period of Sino-American engagement, but the flip would also have been expected soon after the Sino-Soviet split. Instead, relations between the United States and China remained as hostile as ever for much of the following decade.

Nixon and Kissinger’s deft diplomacy is also often cited as the critical ingredient that consummated the Sino-American rapprochemen, yet the flip’s denouement hardly developed as these arch-strategists had envisioned. An oft-misused analogy, the term “Nixon to China” underscores the legacy of the president’s personal statecraft: Nixon had certainly succeeded to exploit the deep-seated divisions between the two Asian giants.

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whereas a succession of American presidents had failed. However, for two years, the White House’s strategy was flatly rebuffed; the actual breakthrough was a spontaneous outgrowth of a chance encounter at an international table tennis tournament. Finally, while they succeeded in leveraging an alignment with China to pressure the Soviets into relaxing global tensions, Nixon and Kissinger floundered in securing China’s help to initiate a graceful exit from Vietnam, the most critical element of their strategy. The American president and his national security adviser’s savoir-faire certainly spawned a flip opportunity, but the actual flip succeeded despite their initial strategic concept.

Besides, these two accounts cannot both be critically causal at once. If China flipped principally out of fear of the Soviet Union, then Nixonian diplomacy was superfluous. If Nixon’s intervention was definitive, then the state of Sino-Soviet relations was extraneous to the flip’s success. The Soviet threat may explain why China was interested in a new ally and Nixon’s strategy may have signaled to China that the interest was reciprocal, but neither factor satisfactorily explains what enabled China to flip alignments when it did. The Communist world had endured other so-called splits—Yugoslavia, Romania, Albania, North Korea, or even North Vietnam—yet China became the only former junior partner to so openly side with the United States against its former patron.

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A New Theory: All About Cohesion

If previous theories for why China flipped in 1971-72 fall short, what best explains the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) realignment? The interplay of two factors is critical. First, the disintegration of the Sino-Soviet alliance allowed China to flip alliances. The initial cohesion of the alliance prevented any American wedge strategies from making inroads. As time went on, China—much like Egypt—began to resent Moscow’s seeming unwillingness to support it in both the Korean and Taiwan crises in the 1950s and became frustrated with diminishing Soviet technical and financial support. Initial ideological and personal differences had grown into deep political and military chasms. Without any real institutions, diverging interests rapidly tore the two allies apart, leading to the unofficial “split” in 1960.

Second, after over a decade of political instability, the Chinese regime had finally cohered, enabling it to make such a momentous policy decision without fear of domestic repercussions. The Great Leap Forward had not only devastated China’s economy, but also had the unintended effect of empowering Mao’s political rivals. Suspicious of rival power centers, within the party and the army, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution to sideline, outflank, and purge regime rivals, culminating with the death of Lin Biao in 1971. Having regained his grip on power, he ended the Cultural Revolution and finally responded to the American diplomatic initiative. Much like Sadat, Mao had to consolidate his power first before embarking on a radical geopolitical realignment.

China’s flip mimics Egypt’s, albeit on a more gradual timescale and with the factors aligning in reverse order. Diverging interests led to frustrations over lackluster support and ultimately ruptured the alignment. Both China and Egypt were dismayed by
Moscow’s desire to temper rather than amplify regional conflicts, but, when they failed to entrap the Soviet Union to deepen its involvement, they sought greater autonomy and downgraded the relationship. Yet, it was only after Mao and Sadat had eliminated intra-regime rivals and consolidated power could they seriously entertain realignment with the United States. For Egypt, Sadat’s insecurity was short; for Mao, it lasted for a decade.

**Flopping Diplomacy From Truman to Johnson**

The Truman Administration had recognized the potential of a Sino-Soviet split even before there was a Sino-Soviet alliance. George Kennan, preeminent Sovietologist and future author of The Long Telegram, suggested China was unlikely to be subservient to Moscow:

1. Chinese Communists have little reason to be grateful to USSR. They have survived and grown not because of but despite relations with Moscow. Adherence to early Comintern directives resulted in near disaster for CCP[Chinese Communist Party]. And in Sino-Jap conflict USSR supplied only Chungking which used some of those arms in blockading Yenan. Current Soviet stripping of Manchuria is plucking plums on which Chinese Communists have long had their eye.
2. Chinese Communist Party is most mature of all Communist Parties and has developed its own brand of Marxism and indigenous traditions.
3. Chinese Communists are no fugitive band of conspirators. For 10 years they have had an established *de facto* regime, their own army and civil administration. Consequently they have developed substantial vested interests.
4. Chinese Communists have taken on nationalist coloration. From 1936 to Jap surrender they were confronted with and their propaganda concentrated against an external foe. Rapid expansion of their armed forces and civilian following was largely on basis of nationalism.²²⁹

The Chinese Communists, Kennan concluded, would be pulled into the Soviet orbit out of necessity—the Japanese occupation had left them weak, traumatized, and poor—but the alliance would hardly be smooth. Rather than apply the Truman Doctrine to China, he surmised, “if you let the Russians alone in China, they will come a cropper on that

problem just as everybody else has for hundreds of years.” Kennan figured it was better to let the natural tensions surface on their own.

Kennan cautioned non-involvement in the Chinese Civil War in order to maintain the possibility of future engagement with the Chinese Communists. In a November 3rd, 1947 study for Secretary of State George Marshall, Kennan argued that a CCP victory would be a setback, but it would “not be a catastrophe.” Mao could not rule all of China and simultaneously defer to Moscow. Tito’s split from Stalin the following summer reinforced Kennan’s argument:

It is a nice piece of irony that at precisely the time the Chinese Communist leadership is most likely to wish to conceal its ties with Moscow, the Kremlin is most likely to be exerting utmost pressure to bring the Chinese Communists under complete control. The possibilities which such a situation would present us, provided we have regained freedom of action, need scarcely be spelled out.

Marshall broadly supported Kennan’s call for non-involvement. “I cannot say to you today,” Kennan said, “whether Titoism is going to spread in Europe,” but “I am almost certain that it is going to spread in Asia.”

The intelligence community, however, disputed Kennan’s analysis. A December 1948 estimate concluded authoritatively “that the Chinese Communist Party has been and is an instrument of Soviet policy” and that “there appears to be no chance of a split within the Party or between the Party and the USSR until the time of Communist domination of

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Five months later, another estimate conceded that there might be some points of conflict, but “until evidence is available that an effective opposition is developing, it is concluded that the CCP will remain loyal to Moscow.” Two months later, another estimate concluded “there is no prospect that the US can alter the Soviet orientation of the Chinese Communists in the immediate future.”

Nevertheless, flipping China became official Truman Administration policy. NSC 34/1 stated “the immediate aim of the United States should...be to prevent China from becoming an adjunct of Soviet power.” It echoed Kennan’s call for non-involvement in internal Chinese affairs while calling for engaging with CCP officials. Further NSC directives called for the U.S. to remain at arms-length of the new Chinese regime, but to use political and economic rewards as a means of spurring rifts between Beijing and Moscow. Trying to signal its intentions to Beijing, Truman announced on January 5th that the U.S. would not defend the Nationalists in Taiwan. A week later, Secretary of State Dean Acheson famously left Taiwan (and Korea) outside of the U.S. defensive perimeter. He even pointedly criticized the Soviet pseudo-taking over of Chinese provinces.

Notwithstanding, the Administration failed to forestall Sino-Soviet

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239 Izumikawa, 513.
240 Izumikawa, 514-516.
241 “This Communistic concept and techniques have armed Russian imperialism with a new and most insidious weapon of penetration. Armed with these new powers, what is happening in China is that the Soviet Union is detaching the northern provinces [areas] of China from China and is attaching them to the Soviet Union. This process is complete in Outer Mongolia. It is nearly complete in Manchuria, and I am sure that in inner Mongolia and in Sinkiang there are very happy reports coming from Soviet agents to Moscow. This is what is going on. It is the detachment of these whole areas, vast area—populated by
alignment; Mao and Stalin signed a thirty-year friendship treaty in February 1950. The Kremlin’s tangible security rewards had trumped the White House’s pledges of non-interference.

Like its predecessor, the Eisenhower Administration also sought to exploit the potential fissures in the Sino-Soviet alliance, but, unlike its predecessor, it believed that the Chinese would abandon their alliance with the Soviets only under withering pressure. As a special adviser to Secretary of State Acheson, Eisenhower’s future Secretary of States John Foster Dulles had convinced him, over Kennan’s objections, to defer UN recognition of the PRC for it smacked of appeasement.242 In a February 1952 Meet the Press interview, Dulles also cited Tito’s split, but as evidence of the success of American pressure: “they couldn’t get any goods or machinery out of this country, Russia couldn’t supply it, and the situation finally got to be one where they just couldn’t go on.” His policy would:

make the going so tough for the present regime in China that it’s going to change in some way. I wouldn’t be sure in advance what way it was going to be changed. It may be changed through the Chinese people putting in a totally different form of Government. It may be changed with a break with Moscow. The essential thing is to have action which will bring about a change.243

Coercing China to flip soon became Eisenhower’s policy. NSC 148 stated comprehensive pressure would be instrumental in “stimulating differences between the Peiping and Moscow regimes and creating cleavages within the Peiping regime itself by

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242 Heer, 96-97.
every practicable means.” The best way of solving the China problem was “through the disruption of this alignment and the detachment of China from the Soviet orbit.” It again cited the Tito example:

Tito demonstrated the possibility of successful defection by foreign Communist leaders from the Kremlin: the Chinese Communist dictator resembles Tito in that he acquired power largely on his own and his country has never been occupied by Soviet troops so that he retains the capability of independent action; conflicts of national interest between China and Russia will eventually lead to a break between Peiping and Moscow.

The “detachment of China as an effective instrument of Soviet policy” was the best way of cutting the Soviet Union down to size in the Far East.246

A November 1953 NSC study concluded that there was potential for major discord between Beijing and Moscow.247 Stalin’s death, Dulles noted, meant “there should be a certain unwillingness on the part of Mao to be dictated to by Moscow as had been possible with Stalin because of the latter’s enormous prestige.” Mao’s new assertiveness among the Communist states “may eventually give us an opportunity for promoting division between the Soviet Union and Communist China in our own common interest.”248 Dulles’s strategy was the inverse of a charm offensive: the best way to flip China “would be to keep the Chinese under maximum pressure rather than by relieving such pressure” which “would compel them to make more demands on the USSR, which

248 Dulles, quoted in Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, 140.
the latter would be unable to meet and the strain would consequently increase.”

A coercive strategy meant supporting the Nationalists and other measures “on the theory of exerting maximum strain causing the Chinese Communists to demand more from Russia and thereby placing additional stress on Russian-Chinese relations.” In December 1954, the U.S. and the Republic of China signed a mutual defense treaty. As Gaddis explains, American support for Taiwan was “a calculated effort to split a hostile alliance by exhausting its junior partner, forcing it to make demands its senior ally could not meet.”

However, Eisenhower’s coercive approach to flipping China also failed. Even as Sino-Soviet differences were exposed over the Taiwan Strait Crisis—Beijing was prepping for war whereas Moscow sought to defuse the situation—Mao showed no evidence of abandoning his senior ally. Less than two years into his presidency, Eisenhower’s State Department eulogized the failed flip attempt. With the Communist regime having consolidated its rule, “it seems most unlikely that external pressures or actions can bring about or hasten its downfall or materially weaken its ties with the Soviet Union.” Instead, Vice President Richard Nixon argued, “a tough coexistence policy may be in the long run the best method of driving a wedge between China and Soviet Russia.”

The consolidation of the Chinese Communist regime may have

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251 Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, 192.
enabled a greater chance of a successful flip, but the Sino-Soviet alliance remained too cohesive during these years as China strongly relied on Soviet support. It would take another decade for that to truly end.

Whereas both the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations actively tried to drive a wedge between Moscow and Beijing, the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations abandoned the endeavor entirely. Kennedy’s belief that China was the more aggressive of the two Communist powers even led him to contemplate a strike on Chinese nuclear facilities. Although there is some evidence to suggest that he was envisaging a pragmatic reassessment of the hardline stance, any new strategy died with the president.254 While a pro-engagement caucus continued to agitate in the early days of the Johnson Administration, the escalation of the war against North Vietnam, whom Johnson saw as being fully backed by Beijing, ended any thought of a strategic flip.255 Ironically, as the Sino-Soviet alliance was dissolving, American flip efforts were increasingly absent.

**Things Fall Apart: Weak Alliance Cohesion**

The alliance between China and the Soviet Union was never highly cohesive, but China’s flip from an American adversary to an ally occurred only after it had truly fallen apart. Moscow had been China’s most important ally, providing diplomatic support and major economic and military modernization assistance. It even seeded China’s nuclear weapons program. However, the alliance never developed institutions, formal or


informal, and relied mostly on vague political agreements between the regimes. Over time, as deep divisions embedded in the relationship surfaced, the alliance’s weak level of cohesion could not prevent the countries’ fraying interests from easily tearing the relationship asunder. Only after the alliance had crumbled and the Chinese regime had become consolidated was the American flip attempt successful.

Following the CCP’s decisive victory in the Chinese Civil War, Mao’s “lean to one side” speech in June 1949 dashed initial American hopes to pry Mao away from Stalin’s grasp. China received two main benefits from the alliance treaty signed with the Soviet Union in February 1950: military and political support against the American threat as well as modernization assistance, particularly industrial, technological, and military.\textsuperscript{256} However, the very nature of “leaning” signaled China would not be a fully committed Soviet satellite, that it had no intention of submitting to Soviet domination, and that it would maintain a high measure of self-reliance. The alliance would be far looser than Moscow preferred.\textsuperscript{257}

Notwithstanding their shared opposition to the United States, the two Communist powers had vastly different strategies of struggle. Whereas China desired direct conflict, the Soviet Union was more content with superpower coexistence, preferring to push back against the United States through proxies. These differences surfaced during the 1950-1953 Korean War and the Quemoy and Matsu Crisis of 1954-55. In Korea, China intervened frontally whereas Stalin maintained a limited and belated involvement. In the Taiwan Straits, China was embittered by the Soviet Union’s unwillingness to issue a

strong deterrent threat to the U.S. until after crisis had passed.\textsuperscript{258} China’s desire to consolidate control over the remaining Nationalist redoubts, even at the risk of conflict with the United States, directly clashed with the Soviet Union’s inclination to temper the situation.

Relations deteriorated further after Stalin’s death in 1953. Having revered Stalin because of his steadfast support for the CCP during World War II and the Chinese Civil War, Mao felt that now he, not Stalin’s successor Nikita Khrushchev, should be the senior global communist leader. Under Khrushchev, the Kremlin constantly criticized the Great Leap Forward, Mao’s industrial acceleration plan, concerned that its predictable failure would add additional strain on Soviet resources, which China was already heavily relying on due to the U.S. economic embargo.\textsuperscript{259} Nevertheless, Mao traveled to Moscow in 1957 and supported Khrushchev. A 1957 Sino-Soviet weapons development agreement greatly assisted China’s development of nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{260}

The second Quemoy and Matsu crisis of 1958 further loosened the alliance. Frustrated by Khrushchev’s tepid support in 1954, Mao did not inform him of his intentions to challenge the status quo in the Taiwan Strait in 1958. He later told Moscow that China would not expect Soviet retaliation against the United States even in the event of American nuclear escalation, essentially telling his senior ally that it was not counting on its assistance. Infuriated at China’s boast of independence, Khrushchev accused Mao

\textsuperscript{259} Izumikawa, 526.

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of purposefully fomenting the Taiwan crisis and reneged on his commitment to provide China with a prototype nuclear weapon. Years later, Chou En-lai, the PRC Premier and critical player in the Sino-American rapprochement, would openly complain to Kissinger about the repeated Russian recriminations, including Moscow’s accusation that China initiated the Sino-Indian War. By the late 1950s, the lack of any formal institutions or clear alliance commitments ensured that China could set its own path out of the alliance.

Although it would take years for the United States to know it, the Sino-Soviet alliance ruptured in 1960. Public sniping began between state-controlled publications and government spokesmen. Incensed at being lectured about Communist ideologies from a supposed junior partner, Moscow unilaterally withdrew all Soviet technicians and advisers, numbering in the thousands, from China in July 1960. At the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union a year later, Khrushchev openly denounced Albania for supporting China. Upset at Moscow’s bullying of a smaller Communist country, China withdrew from the Congress, an action Chou later called a “semi-split.”

By 1960, the Sino-Soviet alliance had traveled the same path as the Soviet-Egyptian alliance, although Beijing was never as beholden to Moscow as Cairo had been. Like Nasser, Mao disliked Khrushchev and was continually disappointed by the underwhelming Soviet support. Frustrations begat alliance tensions as Mao sought to either enlist more robust Soviet support or to expose Soviet fecklessness and allow independent Chinese action. Just as Sadat was unnerved by the 1972 Détente

261 Izumikawa, 527.
264 Whiting, 10; Izumikawa, 527.
265 Whiting, 10.
announcement, Mao was further unsettled by the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty, which he saw as an attempt to prevent Chinese nuclear development. Eventually, China, like Egypt, would see the American flip as a way to achieve its geopolitical objectives, which their respective Soviet alliances were no longer satisfying.

Khrushchev’s fall in 1964 failed to restore the alliance. His successor, Leonid Brezhnev, initiated a long and large buildup of forces along the Chinese border. Beijing’s fears grew substantially after Moscow’s 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, a demonstration of the Kremlin’s capabilities against an uncooperative client state. China began to protest Soviet border violations, but, in March 1969, the two countries clashed multiple times along the Ussuri River in northeast China, with both sides taking casualties. The once-key alliance had degenerated into open warfare.

Never strong to begin with, the Sino-Soviet alliance gradually devolved from a loose pact to counter the United States into armed conflict. Moscow was instrumental in providing Beijing with much needed economic and military support early on, but naturally imbedded ideological divisions and differing geostrategic outlooks ultimately strained the relationship beyond repair. Never institutionalized, there were few mechanisms to keep differences from tearing the alliance apart. American flip attempts under Truman and Eisenhower in the late 1940s and 1950s were never likely to be successful because the alliance remained moderately cohesive. The alliance became far less cohesive after Khrushchev withdrew all Soviet experts in 1960 and the two began publicly bickering, but neither the Kennedy nor Johnson Administrations made much effort to exploit the split.

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266 Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Policy after the Cultural Revolution*, 11.
Achieving Regime Cohesion

Chinese politics are oft mythologized as monolithic, particularly during Mao’s era. However, despite embroiling China in numerous international conflicts, the regime was mainly preoccupied with asserting its writ over a large population and vast war-won territory. With Mao already in his 50s and in increasingly poor health when the PRC was declared, the succession question consumed China. For the remainder of Mao’s life, the greatest threat to his rule came not from the United States or the Soviet Union, but from within the regime itself. With a regime divided amongst several power bases, any significant alignment transformation would have to wait until he had consolidated control.

When Mao launched the PRC’s second Five-Year Plan in 1958, he unintentionally sent China into a thirteen-year period of political destabilization. Each action he took to steady his rule would ironically sprout a new challenge. Known as the Great Leap Forward, it sought to transform China into a labor-intensive industrial society that would be able to match the power of both the United States and the Soviet Union. Through the widespread creation of communes, private farms were collectivized, while rural industrialization—literally the creation of backyard steel furnaces—was encouraged. Instead of accelerating and modernizing the Chinese economy, the Great Leap Forward became an economic and human tragedy. The economy not only shrank, but it also resulted in a historic famine that killed tens of millions of people.

The Great Leap Forward also had the unintended effect of empowering both the army and certain CCP factions at Mao’s expense. Mao even stepped down as Chairman of the PRC, China’s head of state, in April 1959—he, of course, remained chairman of
both the Politburo and the CCP Central Committee, but he began to recognize the potential challenges to his rule. In July 1959, top CCP leaders gathered in Lushan to discuss the Great Leap Forward. Minister of Defense Peng Dehuai, who had recently returned from a visit to the U.S.S.R., wrote a letter to Mao to propose that the party “overcome petit bourgeoisie enthusiasm” and evaluate the “losses and achievements” of the Great Leap Forward. Mao interpreted the criticism as a shot across the bow and attacked Peng, accusing him of turning against the Party by wanting to promote a different set of policies. Soon afterwards, Mao replaced him as defense minister with Lin Biao, effectively ending his career. The removal of Peng Dehuai was only the first in a series of purges of senior leaders, especially military, whom Mao felt threatened his rule.

Hemorrhaging control as a consequence of the Great Leap Forward, Mao subsequently launched the Cultural Revolution in order to regain regime mastery. Until 1966, the Politburo had been a paragon of stability and continuity. Only one Politburo member had died of something other than natural causes (Gao Gand’s 1954 suicide) and only three members, Rao Shushi, Peng Dehuai, and Zhang Wentian, had been ousted from their positions, even though the latter two remained on Politburo. Framed as an effort to purge so-called “revisionists” who veered from ideological purity, in practice the Cultural Revolution’s goals were to oust any anti-Maoist elements from the regime’s main institutions: the party and the army. Over time, these also included actors he believed were colluding with the Soviet Union, as relations between the two former allies increasingly disintegrated.

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Once he had succeeded in doing so, Mao became more able to entertain the notion of a rapprochement with America. Initially, the Cultural Revolution also wreaked havoc on the regime, as the party’s entire apparatus turned inward and tore itself apart. In time, it successfully purged anti-Maoist elements inside the regime and the military, enabling Mao to realign China’s geopolitics without fear of internal complications. While it officially lasted until 1976, the 1972-1976 period was far less traumatic, as any challengers had learned the lessons Mao had imposed on his most prominent challengers: Peng Dehuai, Liu Shaoqui, and Lin Biao. By 1969, the bulk of the “organizational disruption” had concluded, which dovetailed with increasing signs the Chinese put out to the Americans. When he finally ousted Lin Biao two years later, the regime fully responded to American engagement. Once the Chinese regime became cohesive, which meant Maoist control over the military and complete decision-making autonomy without concern for political rivals, the flip accelerated.

During the initial years of the Cultural Revolution, the breakdown in Chinese political institutions actually shifted power away from the Politburo and towards individuals. The disruption led to the creation of temporary organizations to run the country, such as the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group (CCRSG), led by Jian Qing (or Madame Mao as she was known,) and the Working Group of the Central Military Committee, two ad hoc organizations held together by personal ties. The regime became reclusive and introspective, concerned first and foremost in identifying and purging internal rivals. What was once a highly centralized foreign policy structure under Foreign Minister Chen Yi, external relations increasingly were conducted by the

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Unsurprisingly, it became far more cautious in its external affairs. Mao not only refused to respond to any American engagement, but he also studiously avoided any direct confrontation with the United States in Vietnam.

As Mao’s purges accelerated, his gaze turned to those initially closest to him: his potential successors Liu Shaoqui and Lin Biao. Liu Shaoqui was CCP Vice President from 1956-1966, PRC President from 1959-1968, and Mao’s initial designated successor, but quickly fell out of favor during the Cultural Revolution. His advocacy for a more pragmatic approach to China’s development problems ran afoul of Mao’s central party leadership clique’s commitment to “permanent revolutionary” solutions. Unwilling to tolerate even constructive dissent, Mao demoted Liu within the Politburo in August 1966 and removed him from senior Party positions. In an attempt to link his suspicions of Moscow with those inside the country, Mao would even label Liu as “China’s Khrushchev.” It took three years, but Mao had successfully purged his second main challenger.

In outmaneuvering Liu, Mao had further empowered the army. In particular, Minister of Defense Lin Biao became the object of Mao’s favoritism. Appointed Defense Minister in 1959 following the purge of his predecessor Peng Dehuai, Lin energetically implemented Mao’s desire to reform the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) under greater Party control. By 1963, the PLA’s “political work system” was revived and

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270 Chen, 13.
272 Sandschneider, 653.
273 Chen, 84.
preeminence was given to the “Thought of Mao Tse-tung.” Nevertheless, the military still had “loyalty groups” centered around senior military leaders, notably Lin Biao, Marshal Ho Lung, Marshal Hsu Hsiang-ch’ien, Marshal Ch’en Yi. Lin’s formal power base was a loyalty group in the Fourth Field Army, Central Military Organs, and the air force. The Cultural Revolution, launched in 1966, made the PLA predominant in Chinese politics, but Lin still maintained his base of support.

The Cultural Revolution had a cataclysmic effect on the nature, strength, and unity of the Chinese regime. Although it eventually created a more cohesive regime, it did so only after its worst moments of regime dissension. In three short years, more than half of the Central Committee was purged. While many anti-Maoists were expunged, the Party machinery had also disintegrated. Many withdrew entirely from political life in order to save their lives. By the April 1969 Party Congress, “the Central Committee remained largely a head without a body, and it took, in fact, more than three years until at least two-thirds of the Party units had been reestablished.”

The Cultural Revolution’s cannibalism of CCP leadership cleared the path for the PLA to accumulate more political power. Mao’s rump Party faction was forced into an unstable and loose alliance with Lin’s powerful PLA cadre. In April 1969, Lin became sole Vice-Chairman of the Party and was proclaimed Mao’s successor by the Party. By 1970, the ruling regime was a coalition of four barely coexisting groups, each with different expectations: the Cultural Revolution Left controlled the cultural, educational,

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276 Domes, 350.
278 Kau and Perrolle, 560.
and propaganda machines; Lin’s Fourth Army had decisive influence over the PLA; Regional PLA Commanders had expanded control over the provincial party apparatus; and the State Administration had become independent from the CCP itself. When Lin sought to remodel the provincial party system along lines of military mobilization, crossing the prerogatives of another group, a major intra-regime clash ensued.²⁷⁹

At the August 1970 Party plenum at Lushan, the tensions became public. Lin’s allies sought to undo Mao’s previous order that the new State Constitution should not establish a State Chairmanship, which Mao saw as a plot to eventually unseat him. Shocked by the attack on his policies by Lin loyalists, Mao criticized Lin’s propagation of “theory of genius” and Lin’s formalistic way of running the army.²⁸⁰ Reasserting his authority, Mao purged Chen Boda, a Lin ally and the fourth most senior Chinese official, and pressured Lin’s senior military supporters into making self-criticism for having backed Chen. He also formally recognized the CCP Military Affairs Commission and the Beijing Military Region, a naked attempt to pry some military control away from Lin’s power base.²⁸¹ Mao later called it “a struggle between two headquarters.”²⁸²

Over the next five months, Mao maneuvered to weaken Lin’s power bases. First, in September, he launched a “Criticize Chen Rectification Campaign,” demanding

²⁸⁰ Sandschneider, 651.
²⁸¹ Sandschneider, 652-653.
²⁸² Kau and Perrolle, 560-561. Lin’s exact attitudes were difficult to discern. Chinese scholars generally believe Lin opposed improving relations with Washington and his downfall certainly enhanced the power of Chou En-lai, who supported the American rapprochement. Chen, 270. For some of the difficult methodological problems in ascertaining the full story of Lin’s fall, see Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, The Tragedy of Lin Biao: Riding the Tiger During the Cultural Revolution (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 2-9. As leading revisionists, Teiwes and Sun cast Lin as a reluctant rival and tragic figure, as opposed to an ambitious Soviet stooge.
Central Committee members condemn Chen and his supporters. In December, at an Enlarged Politburo Conference at Peitaiho, he insisted on criticism and self-criticism of seven “big generals” who supported Lin. Second, he added his own loyalists to the Military Affairs Commission. Finally, he reorganized the top leadership of the Peking Military Region. In January 1971, he transferred the Thirty-Eighth Army, a unit loyal to Lin that had been moved to Peking in 1966, out of the Peking Military Region and relieved its commander, a Lin loyalist. By early 1971, Mao had dismantled Lin’s regime power base.

Fighting for his political life, Lin, and his son, Deputy Director of Operations of the Air Force, began secretly organizing a military coup. Entitled “Project 571”, a Chinese numerical homonym for “armed uprising,” the plot involved senior officers in the Fourth and Fifth Air Force Groups as well as reliable units in the Shanghai, Peking, and Canton regions. Loyal Air Force units were to quickly seize control of the Shanghai-Nanking area and subsequently extend their control while maintaining strict control over radio and communications links. The plot would climax with Mao’s assassination on September 12th, 1971 by bombing his train while he was on an inspection tour near Shanghai.

However, Lin’s daughter revealed the plot to Chou En-lai just in time to save Mao’s life. With the plot uncovered, Lin, his wife, and his son sought to escape to the U.S.S.R., but their Air Force jet crashed in Mongolia, killing all aboard, in the early

283 Kau and Perrolle, 560-561.
284 Kau and Perrolle, 561.
285 Kau and Perrolle, 561.
286 Kau and Perrolle, 561.
287 Kau and Perrolle, 561.
288 Kau and Perrolle, 571.
289 Kau and Perrolle, 571.
morning of September 13th. Five close associates of Lin, all Politburo members and heads of PLA service arms or operational departments, were soon arrested and dismissed from office. Mao had finally overcome his biggest rival. To hide the splits from the public, it took months for Mao and the Politburo to announce Lin’s death and it was explained by talking about Lin’s supposed crimes.

While the two differed about the scope of the Soviet threat, the Lin-Mao clash was primarily about the organization of Chinese society, specifically over whether to re-centralize or continue decentralizing economic and societal planning. Lin disapproved of the Cultural Revolution’s ideological rigidity and did not offer a full-throated defense of Mao’s policies. The coup might have had some tacit Soviet support—Moscow would have supported any attempt to weaken Mao at this juncture—but it was truly about Lin’s attempt to consolidate his power base versus Mao’s basic principle of maintaining a large “divide and rule” policy. Once Lin’s loyalty was in question, the clash became inevitable. Having risen rapidly from becoming minister of defense in 1959 to sole Vice Chairman of CCP in 1966 to being named Mao’s designated successor in 1969, Lin’s downfall was even more dramatic in 1970-1971.

Lin’s dramatic fall allowed Mao to finally engage with the United States, but he continued to consolidate power away from the PLA. 32 senior generals were arrested and dismissed. By early 1973, 25 regional and district level commanders and political commissars and 48 senior provincial-level party secretaries were removed. At the next Central Committee elections in August 1973, the PLA’s power was nearly wiped out. Of

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291 Qiu, 5-6.
292 Domes and Sandschneider, 11.
293 Kau and Perrolle, 573-574.
294 Kau and Perrolle, 575.
the 195 full members and 124 alternate members, the PLA accounted for only 29 percent and 23 percent respectively, a drop of 10 percent. 76 percent of military leaders failed to get reelected to the Central Committee. In the 25-member Politburo, military representation dropped from 52 percent to 20 percent. In order to forestall future challenges to his leadership from the PLA or the Party, Mao also deposed the top military commanders and political commissars in eight out of the eleven military regions.\textsuperscript{295}

The Mao-Chou and Lin-Chen split in the regime extended across multiple axes, including those directly relevant to China’s alliances. In addition to divisions over agriculture policy, economic centralization, and political ideology following the Cultural Revolution, Chou sought a détente with the U.S. whereas Lin wanted to continue the conflict.\textsuperscript{296} Chou had realized that improved relations with Washington would help fend off Soviet pressure, but internal pressure from those within regime who opposed negotiations with the U.S. on principle helped scuttle the initial Warsaw talks.\textsuperscript{297} Divisions at home blocked any new diplomatic initiatives.

Unquestionably, Beijing’s perception of a threatening Soviet Union prompted Chinese interest in a more positive Sino-American relationship. As the threat increased, particularly after the 1969 border clashes, interest spiked. As one historian notes, although the Soviet threat “makes good sense in explaining why in 1968-69 it was necessary for Beijing to make major changes in Chinese foreign policy and security strategy, it does not explain how and why it became possible for Beijing’s leaders to achieve such changes in the late 1960s and early 1970s.”\textsuperscript{298} The Cultural Revolution

\textsuperscript{295} Kau and Perrolle, 576.
\textsuperscript{296} Domes and Sandschneider, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{297} Sutter, \textit{Chinese Foreign Policy after the Cultural Revolution}, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{298} Chen, 241.
ultimately destroyed Mao’s opponents as planned, but, in doing so, the Chinese regime, including state, party, and military institutions, was on the verge of total collapse. Mao’s ability to dispatch a series of other potential pillars of powers finally permitted him, and his faction, to pursue a path that would otherwise have been too perilous to attempt. Not coincidentally, China became more receptive to American engagement after Mao had declared a soft end to the Cultural Revolution and after he had outwitted any pretenders to the throne. Once he had done so, relations progressed fairly rapidly.

**Nixon’s Propitious Arrival**

Richard Nixon was inaugurated at the cusp of China’s shifting predicament: its alliance had disintegrated and Mao was on the verge of finally sidelining his remaining opposition. Despite a well-earned reputation as an anti-Communist hawk, Nixon was intent on playing the “China card”; Congressional politics had blocked a visit to China during the dying days of his vice presidency.\(^{299}\) In a 1965 swing through Asia, Nixon reportedly told several U.S. diplomats of the imperative of developing a more normal relationship with the PRC.\(^{300}\) In a widely-read 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article, he detailed his desire to revive the moribund U.S.-China relationship.\(^{301}\)

On the other hand, Nixon’s young National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, remained skeptical.\(^{302}\) In the early months in office, he complained of Nixon’s “flight of

\(^{299}\) Handel, 178.

\(^{300}\) James Mann argues Nixon’s transformation on China came before 1967, but that the article was the first time he had written it down. James Mann, *About Face: A History of America’s Curious Relationship With China, From Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 17.


\(^{302}\) Mann, 18.
fantasy,” but, after seeing how intent Nixon was, came around by the end of the year.\textsuperscript{303} An American opening to China, he wrote, would have “constructive ends—to give each Communist power a stake in better relations with us.”\textsuperscript{304} Kissinger had recognized the potential of exploiting Sino-Soviet fissures in 1961, unaware that the two had split a year earlier.\textsuperscript{305} A cohesive alliance, Kissinger assessed, between these two Communist powers was impossible. “One of the ironies of relations among Communist countries,” Kissinger relayed in his memoirs, is that “a rival claim to represent true orthodoxy is a mortal challenge.” The ideological conflict between Moscow and Beijing “could be resolved only by the willing subordination of one to the other, which was impossible; or the victory of one over the other, which in Peking’s view was precisely Moscow’s aim.”\textsuperscript{306} Like Kennan, Kissinger was confident that the very definition of Communism would ensure tumultuous relations between its two largest adherents.

Nixon and Kissinger initially, and ultimately mistakenly, theorized that China’s flip would help allay America’s Indochina predicament, but its true objective was to unsettle Moscow and compel it into Détente. Although Kissinger sheepishly admitted that he had always assumed that China, not Russia, was the more aggressive of the two Communist powers, the pair sought to exploit Chinese vulnerabilities and growing fears of the Soviet threat in order to bind China into a strategic relationship. Epitomized by the 1969 border clashes, that hostility, Kissinger surmised, played right into America’s

\textsuperscript{303} As one biographer put it, “Kissinger was a mere passenger on the Administration’s China train. The President was clearly its sole engineer.” Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, \textit{Kissinger} (New York: Dell, 1975), 253.
\textsuperscript{304} Henry Kissinger, \textit{White House Years} (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Co, 1979), 192.
\textsuperscript{306} Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, 47.
hands. Soviet divisions on the Chinese border would increase from twenty-one in 1969, to thirty-three in 1971, to forty-five in 1973. Over time, Washington would back China’s ally Pakistan in its 1971 war with India, provide China with both military assistance and sensitive intelligence reports, and worked to ensure that China could defend itself against Soviet aggression.

Nixon publicly signaled his interest in improved relations early despite opposition from within his government. In his inaugural address, he appealed to China and called for “an open world—open to ideas, open to the exchange of goods and people—a world in which no people, great or small, will live in angry isolation.” In a major foreign policy address, Secretary of State William Rogers declared the Administration’s intent to “take initiatives to reestablish more normal relations with Communist China.” Nixon also immediately ended the U.S. Navy patrol boats’ provocative sweeps of the Chinese coast and, in the fall, ended the regular patrols of the 7th Fleet through the Taiwan Straits. Both the Pentagon and the State Department issued reports that cast doubt on Nixon’s strategy despite concurring that each Communist power wished to “use its own relations with the US as a means of checkmating the other's policies.” A February 1969 National

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308 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 46.
309 Handel, 181.
310 Rogers, quoted in MacMillan, 164.
311 MacMillan, 164.
Intelligence Estimate (NIE) cited Soviet fears of a Sino-American rapprochement. A March Special NIE concluded that “there are signs of some great flexibility in tactics” and that China “may be coming to feel that they have more room for maneuver vis-a-vis the US than the USSR.”

Even though internal Chinese regime machinations flummoxed any diplomacy, Nixon would continue to signal his intentions for a better relationship. After an NSC study on U.S. China policy predictably concluded the U.S. would be best served by an improved relationship with China, the Administration eased some small trade and travel restrictions and informed allies that it was seeking a constructive channel to the Chinese. However, when he directed Kissinger to pursue a Chinese request for a meeting in late February that had come via the Chinese Chargé d’Affaires in Warsaw, the talks were scuttled by hardliners within the Chinese regime who favored a firmer position against both superpowers. Nevertheless, Kissinger publicly reiterated Nixon’s desire for “maximum contact” with China.

By the spring, the White House began to realize that continuing discord within the Chinese regime was preventing any reciprocation to American entreaties. In late April, Kissinger forwarded to Nixon a CIA and State Department assessment of the Chinese leadership. The regime is in “a continuing stalemate,” with Mao’s initiatives being blocked by both the Party and the Army. It remained “focused upon domestic issues and

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314 SNIE 13-69: Communist China and Asia, 6 March 1969 in Tracking the Dragon, 528.
316 MacMillan, 164.
317 Handel, 181.
318 Sutter, Chinese Foreign Policy After the Cultural Revolution, 81.
319 Handel, 183.
probably upon the contest for power, but because of divided councils there is not even a clear mandate as to the direction of future domestic policies.” The CCP’s recent 9th Party Congress featured “continued policy differences, the failure to resolve the existing power stalemate between Mao and the leaders who resist his revolutionary programs, the focus upon domestic issues, the failure to resolve those issues in any clear fashion, and the lack of foreign policy initiatives.” Mao’s Cultural Revolution had successfully purged many leaders opposed to him, but “he has not been able to dictate a new leadership to the Party.” This division, especially on foreign policy, “makes it almost certain that China will flounder for the next year or two without clear policy direction.”

Nonetheless, Nixon ignored the Communist regime’s lack of political cohesion. On July 21st, 1969, the State Department lifted most travel restrictions on U.S. citizens going to China. A few days later, he issued the Guam Doctrine, which precluded future direct American military intervention on the Asian continent, a clear signal to China that Korea- or Vietnam-like American military engagements were over. In December, Nixon announced the U.S. would remove nuclear weapons from Okinawa. Secretary Rogers publicly explained that the Administration sought “to remove irritants in our relations” and reiterated that “we would welcome a renewal of the talks with Communist China.”

Yet, despite increasingly costly signals of a new American approach towards China, Mao would not bite. Twenty-one fully equipped Soviet divisions on the Chinese border and

321 Handel, 185.
322 Rogers, quoted in Handel, 187.
Sino-Soviet military clashes were not enough to prompt a Chinese response to American signals.\footnote{Kissinger, *White House Years*, 177. In his memoirs, Kissinger explained how the clashes changed his mind about Chinese hostility: “Originally I had accepted the fashionable view that the Chinese were the more militant country. But when I looked at a detailed map and saw that the Sinkiang incidents took place only a few miles from a Soviet railhead and several hundred miles from any Chinese railhead, it occurred to me that Chinese military leaders would not have picked such an unpropitious spot to attack. After that I looked at the problem differently.”}

In September 1969, with Beijing still unresponsive, the Administration authorized its Ambassador to Poland to make direct contact with his Chinese counterpart. The timing seemed apt. In a recent memo, the NSC had stated that the pragmatists in the Beijing regime were in ascendance because “concern over the Soviet problem may make them more receptive to US overtures than at any time in the past several years.”\footnote{Memorandum From John H. Holdridge of National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), October 8, 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, 104.} A CIA analysis of Sino-Soviet relations at the end of the year echoed that assessment, suggesting that “Peking will remain the vulnerable and defensive party and seek to improve its international diplomatic position.”\footnote{Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, December 27, 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, 156.} After some delay, the message got through and in January 1970 the Warsaw channel was resurrected, although little progress was made despite Kissinger’s optimism.\footnote{Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, January 21, 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, 171.} After two meetings on January 20\textsuperscript{th} and February 20\textsuperscript{th}, the Chinese canceled further talks, ostensibly to protest American actions in Cambodia. A year after his inauguration and having emitted a series of friendly gestures, Nixon’s diplomatic offensive had not moved an inch, despite Sino-Soviet military clashes.

Internal Chinese divisions continued to stymie the American flip attempt, but the contest for China’s diplomatic direction was clearly reaching an inflection point. In an
early June conversation with a Romanian counterpart, Chou En-lai explained that he personally favored moving forward with the American initiative but that the Chinese leadership was divided.\footnote{Handel, 192.} A July 1970 intelligence report described “the evident slippage in power of the old guard leadership” and “the reappearance of the more radical “cultural revolutionaries.”” Although the report noted “continuing signs of the subtle, opportunistic type of foreign policy which we usually associate with Chou,” it warned that “there may be erratic or contradictory behavior, some of it attributable to tensions within a delicately balanced leadership coalition.” The report even speculated that intra-regime attempts to sabotage Chou’s diplomacy had prompted the apparent attempt to shoot down an American C-130 that June. Nevertheless, during an interview with Mao, “Chou En-lai appeared to be very much at ease and was in constant conversation with Mao. Lin Piao, supposedly the heir apparent, was unshaven and unkempt; seemed to be in poor health, and said not a word.”\footnote{Memorandum From Lindsey Grant of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), July 31, 1970, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, 225-226.} Lin-Mao relations had turned sour in April 1969 after the Ninth Congress, escalated during the summer of 1970, and would culminate in a showdown between their main supporters at Central Committee plenary session from August 23-September 6, 1970 in Lushan. The American invasion of Cambodia that summer also prevented any forward movement, but the slow pace of communications was primarily the consequence of the internal battle between Mao and Lin.\footnote{Chen, 253. For a comprehensive recounting of the Sino-American diplomatic dance in this period, see Chen, 249-268.}
Once Mao had gained the upper hand in his clash for control, the regime finally reciprocated Nixon’s outreach efforts through the Pakistan channel at year’s end.\textsuperscript{330} After Nixon conveyed to his Romanian and Pakistani counterparts his desire for high-level talks in Beijing, he finally received word from Chou, who claimed to be speaking on behalf of both Mao and Lin, that China would welcome an American envoy—even Nixon himself—to Beijing to discuss matters.\textsuperscript{331} Beijing, an NIE concluded:

\begin{quote}
has moved from its previous intransigence to a more flexible approach better designed to exploit the Sino-US relationship for Chinese purposes. The Chinese hope to unsettle the Soviets by playing on their fears of a Sino-American rapprochement as well as exploit the potential for changes in the balance of forces in East Asia resulting from the drawdown of the US military presence.\textsuperscript{332}
\end{quote}

However, the February 1971 South Vietnamese invasion of Laos, backed by U.S. airpower, led to a six-week freeze in contact with China.\textsuperscript{333} The hoped for breakthrough was once again delayed, but it did not stop Nixon from ending all travel restrictions on Americans visiting China in March 1971.\textsuperscript{334}

A fortuitous and impromptu table tennis encounter in Japan would break the ice. In early April, the Chinese table tennis team invited its American counterpart to China, where the team spent a week and had an audience with Chou. In return, on April 14\textsuperscript{th}, Nixon ended most of the remaining trade restrictions between the two countries,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{330} To secretly contact Beijing, Nixon would type an unsigned note, which was handed to the Pakistani Ambassador in Washington, who personally delivered it to Yahya Khan, who then read it aloud to the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan. Having checked the Chinese Ambassador’s notes for accuracy, the copied note was then delivered to Mao. Messages sometimes took weeks to be delivered, but it allowed the White House to keep the channel a secret, even from other parts of the government. MacMillan, 174.

\textsuperscript{331} Mann, 26-27; Handel, 193-196. At an October 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1970 dinner with Ceausescu at the White House, Nixon used the term “People’s Republic of China” for the first time. Although most ignored it, Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin was in attendance, noticed it, and contacted Kissinger later that night to ask if there was any meaning behind it. Kissinger assured him there wasn’t.

\textsuperscript{332} NIE 13-7-70: Communist China’s International Posture, 12 November 1970 in Tracking the Dragon, 586.

\textsuperscript{333} Handel, 198.

\textsuperscript{334} MacMillan, 176.
\end{footnotesize}
including the issuance of expedited visas for Chinese travellers and relaxation of currency controls on the PRC use of dollars. At the end of the month, Chou finally responded to Nixon’s message from December 1970 and invited a senior U.S. envoy to Beijing. Nixon and Kissinger had finally gotten the opening they needed. On June 2nd, Kissinger received the Pakistani Ambassador whose note from Chou included a warm invitation for Kissinger to come to Beijing that June. As Nixon read the message, Kissinger said “this is the most important communication that has come to an American President since the end of World War II.” He later amended it to the Civil War. “They’re scared of the Russians. That’s got to be it,” Nixon told Kissinger the next day. The following week, the Treasury Department formally lifted all restrictions on dollar transactions with China, essentially allowing for renewal of trade.

After years of trying, Mao had finally responded to the U.S. desire for a more cooperative relationship. Certainly, the Nixon Administration had made a series of positive unilateral gestures towards the Chinese, from removing economic and travel restrictions to reducing the U.S. military posture in the region. Yet, as a State Department report aptly concluded, “the new element in the situation is not US intent but Peking's willingness to go along.” By late 1970, China’s “willingness to go along” was the result of two distinct developments. First, the existing alliance between China and the Soviet Union, never as cohesive as outsiders imagined, had completely disintegrated and

335 MacMillan, 180.
337 Kissinger, quoted in MacMillan, 183.
339 Handel, 204.
degenerated into armed clashes. Second, after over a decade of regime-led political upheaval, Mao had finally consolidated his control over regime decision-making by outflanking his final major rival. With these two critical factors now pointing in the right direction, China’s interest in a flip finally matched its ability to conclude one.

After some needed subterfuge in Pakistan, Kissinger slipped out on July 8th for 48 intense hours in China, 17 of those in discussions with Chou. At their first meeting, the Soviets were mentioned only in passing as the “superpower to the north.” Most of the fortnight focused on preparation for Nixon’s visit, although the two reached a diplomatic compromise on the Taiwan issue and Kissinger promised that Nixon would normalize relations within two years after his reelection. Reporting back to Nixon, Kissinger wrote that his “two-day visit to Peking resulted in the most searching, sweeping and significant discussions I have ever had in government.” The groundwork for a Nixon visit was laid and “if carefully managed, our new China policy could have a longer term beneficial impact on Moscow.” Although China offered no help on Vietnam, Nixon’s announcement of Kissinger’s visit several days later unsettled Hanoi and the atmospherics allowed Nixon to escalate bombing and mining operations without risking a confrontation with China.

Residual effects of the Mao-Lin contest would continue to shadow the alliance flip. The same night Chou briefed Mao on the Kissinger meetings, he also updated him on the status of Lin’s followers in the PLA General Staff. When Mao learned none had

341 MacMillan, 193.
343 Mann, 31.
345 Mann, 34.
made “self-criticism,” he announced that “the struggle beginning at the Lushan conference has not finished yet” and that “behind them[Lin’s followers] there is a big plot.”

In a September 22nd, 1971 memo to Nixon, Kissinger speculated on the recent Chinese regime rumblings. It could be, he wrote, “the radical leadership faction within the Party which has opposed the more moderate course of people such as Chou En-lai has not been completely defeated,” or that “Mao Tse-tung is dead or is seriously ill,” or that “Mao’s chosen successor, Lin Piao, may be ill or dead.”

Although Kissinger and Nixon didn’t quite know it, the Lin-Mao conflict had reached its ultimate end, with Mao having preempted a coup and Lin’s death during his escape. Although Mao had firmly gained the upper hand in early 1971, this marked the closing of the Lin chapter.

Kissinger’s return visit to China in October, where he solidified the details of the Nixon visit and smoothed over the Taiwan language, marked the true beginning of China’s realignment. That winter, the United States supported Pakistan, China’s ally, during its war with Soviet-backed India. Kissinger provided China with detailed intelligence reports on Indian troop deployments.

The U.S. and China, Kissinger told Nixon, were now on the same side and “we can’t allow a friend of ours and China’s to get screwed in a conflict with a friend of Russia’s.” Nixon ordered an American naval task force to sail toward the coast of East Pakistan in order to pressure the Indians and perhaps deter Soviet action. As the war seemed poised to escalate to the great powers, Kissinger, for the first time, offered to present China with U.S. satellite intelligence about

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346 Mao, quoted in Chen, 270.
348 Goh, 481.
349 Kissinger, quoted in Goh, 481.
350 MacMillan, 222.
Soviet force dispositions.\textsuperscript{351} Unable to save Pakistan from defeat, Nixon and Kissinger nonetheless stressed to China how supportive they had been of Pakistan.\textsuperscript{352}

\textbf{Nixon’s Trip: Walking Through an Open Door}

Nixon had hoped to achieve real diplomatic breakthroughs in his inaugural trip to China—the first ever by a sitting American president—and the summit did indeed touch on Taiwan, Indochina, and Japan among other topics. He had sought to leverage Chinese assistance in Indochina and wished the two nations could cooperate on “a more stable Asia” and act as “a restraint on the U.S.S.R.”\textsuperscript{353} Yet, even before the trip, he internalized that Chinese help would not be forthcoming. “We are ending our involvement” in Vietnam, Nixon wrote to himself. “We had hoped you would help—but now it doesn’t matter. We must end it honorably—+ will.”\textsuperscript{354} Nixon and Kissinger tried to condition a U.S. withdrawal from Taiwan on Chinese help in ending the Vietnam War to no avail, unaware of the tension between Hanoi and Beijing.\textsuperscript{355} Nixon also assuaged Chou on Taiwan, although he explained it would take time for the U.S. to fully change its policy and posture due to domestic politics.\textsuperscript{356}

Most consequently, Nixon and Kissinger agreed to provide sensitive information about the Soviets directly to the Chinese. Not only would the two align directly against the Soviet Union, but they, in Nixon’s words, could work “in tandem” in order to

\textsuperscript{351} Goh, 481-482.
\textsuperscript{353} NPM, White House Special Files, President’s Personal Files, Box 7, Folder “China Notes,” cited in MacMillan, 234.
\textsuperscript{354} Nixon’s notes, February 15, 1972, quoted in Mann, 40.
\textsuperscript{355} MacMillan, 263-271.
\textsuperscript{356} MacMillan, 257-260.
“balance Russia” in India and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{357} On his second visit in 1971, Kissinger brought copies of various U.S.-U.S.S.R. agreements, including one detailing the methods for preventing an accidental nuclear war.\textsuperscript{358} During Nixon’s trip, Kissinger met with the Vice Chairman of China’s Military Affairs Committee and handed over classified information on Soviet military capabilities and a list of main issues between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.\textsuperscript{359} The information included lists of Soviet weapons, maps showing military deployments, and even specifics numbers on speeds, ranges, and sites. He even briefed them on the status of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. Nixon even offered to brief Chou on the exact position of Soviet forces on Chinese border.\textsuperscript{360}

The level of detail Kissinger shared is quite startling. In another late night meeting, Kissinger disbursed a comprehensive assessment of the status of Soviet forces:

Motorized rifle divisions have the following major items of equipment. You remember I mentioned that there are 186 medium tanks; 200 armored personnel carriers; 4 frog launchers; 144 artillery pieces. They are broken down into 54 mortars; 54 122mm howitzers; 18 152mm howitzers; 18 multiple rocket launchers; 28 anti-aircraft weapons; 45 anti-tank artillery; 1,178 trucks and tender purpose vehicles (fuel tankers). I will review some of these figures that seem low to me. The tank division has 310 medium tanks; 80 armored personnel carriers; 4 frog launchers; 18 mortars; 60 122mm howitzers; 18 multiple rocket launchers; 68 anti-aircraft weapons; 9 anti-tank artillery; and 1,108 general transportation that includes cargo trucks, vans, and tankers. On Soviet surface-to-air missile sites. I gave you the number of sites last time. Each SA–2 site has four double launchers. Or, eight missiles—two together like this (HAK[Kissinger] shows with fingers). Each SA–5 site has six launchers. I told you I would let you know about Soviet tactical aircraft in western Russia and Europe. The total number in eastern Europe and western Russia is 2,230 of which 1,000 are in western Russia and 1,230 in eastern Europe. We estimated that about 1,000 could be shifted to these. Of course, in practice they can all be shifted. We think in a realistic scenario that the ones in western Russia could be shifted.\textsuperscript{361}

\textsuperscript{357} Mann, 42.
\textsuperscript{358} MacMillan, 242. Some accounts even suggest Kissinger shared sensitive intelligence on his first trip. Mann, 35-36.
\textsuperscript{359} MacMillan, 242.
The meeting concluded with Kissinger promising to share any future relevant information. The practice continued under President Ford. In 1974, Kissinger and Bud McFarlane, then his assistant, visited China and handed over hundreds of pages of classified material right before a Vladivostok summit between Ford and Brezhnev. In return, China gave the U.S. access to intelligence gathering sites in China.

China’s flip, capped by Nixon’s successful visit, manifested several immediate benefits. An April 1972 NIE assessed that it has “occurred to the Soviets that the US may gain some increased freedom of maneuver against them and that Washington and Peking will in some situations follow parallel policies to Moscow's detriment” and “that the Chinese may be on the way to obtaining Western (and Japanese) industrial equipment and technology.” Although China’s flip prompted Moscow to embrace Détente, it did not lessen its pressure on Beijing. By 1973, Moscow had deployed 45 divisions along its border with China, twice as many as in 1969.

Following a subsequent trip to China in February 1973, Kissinger glorified the new alignment. Writing to Nixon, Kissinger opined about how “we are now in the extraordinary situation that, with the exception of the United Kingdom, the PRC might well be closest to us in its global perceptions.” “For in plain terms,” Kissinger wrote in another memo, “we have now become tacit allies.” Plainly viewing Moscow as far

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362 MacMillan, 243.
364 Mann, 62.
more dangerous than Beijing, Kissinger said “for the next 15 years we have to lean toward the Chinese against the Russians. We have to play this balance of power game totally unemotionally. Right now, we need the Chinese to correct the Russians, and to discipline the Russians… Our concern with China right now, in my view Mr. President, is to use it as a counterweight to Russia, not for its local policy.”

The pace of normalization proved slower than promised. Watergate felled Nixon, which was deeply disconcerting to the Chinese. Ford and Kissinger worked hard to reassure Beijing, but domestic political pressure—especially in the wake of the fall of Saigon in 1975—forced Ford to slow diplomatic normalization. Nevertheless, by end of May 1975, Washington had removed its last combat aircraft, F-4 squadrons, from Taiwan. Bilateral trade flourished, growing from $5 million in 1971 to $930 million in 1974, 80 percent of it U.S. exports to China. In late 1978, the Carter Administration fulfilled Nixon’s pledge and formally transferred diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, thus consolidating the flip.

**Conclusion**

China’s flip from an American adversary to an American ally was the greatest geopolitical development of the Cold War. After two decades of failed attempts, its success in 1971 was a strategic coup. It not only reduced tensions across the Asian littoral, but it also propelled the Soviet Union into Détente. Two decades of outright

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368 Mann, 68.

hostility gave way to two decades of close political, military, and intelligence cooperation against the U.S.S.R. and its proxies.

Certainly, increasing Chinese fears of Soviet encroachment spurred Beijing’s search for additional security. Threat alone, however, is not sufficient to drive a country into the arms of its former enemy. In fact, as China’s Soviet anxiety was spiking in the 1960s, Sino-American relations seemed to be veering into another conflict, either over Chinese nuclear weapons or Vietnam. At that time, the conditions that would allow China to exit its alliance and enter a counter-balancing one simply did not exist. The Soviet threat may explain why China was interested in aligning with the United States, but it does not explain what made that alignment flip possible and successful.

Parallel in both time and process to Egypt’s flip, China’s flip became a reality only after two critical variables had aligned: its alliance’s decreasing cohesion and its regime’s increasing cohesion. Chinese frustrations with underwhelming Soviet support revealed deep ideological, personal, and policy divisions, which tore at the alliance. Weak cohesion during the 1950s morphed into abject antagonism in the 1960s, punctuated by the drastic “split” in 1960. With few institutionalized mechanisms, strains could not be eased and the relationship turned hostile. In the spring of 1969, the two former allies confronted each other in battle. Led by Mao and Chou, the regime realized its state of weakness and sought a pragmatic rapprochement with the United States. With weak terms, no alliance institutions, and decreasing ideological convergence, the Sino-Soviet alliance self-combusted.

Nevertheless, the alliance’s breakdown did not immediately lead to a resumption of Sino-American relations. While the Sino-Soviet split occurred in 1960, the Chinese
regime was not strongly cohesive until late 1970. The Cultural Revolution, launched in 1966, wreaked chaos on the regime, gutted the party institutions, and empowered the army. It took Mao and Chou several years to regain full control and outflank, marginalize, and ultimately destroy a series of potential rivals, capped by the death of Lin, Mao’s one-time designated successor. Lin’s attempted coup, discovered after Kissinger’s groundbreaking July 1971 visit, was preempted, ending all intra-regime opposition to Mao’s moves. China could not flip until both its alliance with the Soviets had been weakened and the cohesion of its regime had been strengthened.
Chapter Four: The Myth of Sacro Egoismo: Italy and World War I

Unlike the Cold War flips of Egypt and China, Italy’s jump from the Triple Alliance to the Triple Entente in the early days of World War I often escapes history’s radar. The Great War is remembered for many momentous developments—France’s decimation, the dissolution of multiple empires, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the American entry into the Continent to name a few—yet Italy’s betrayal is frequently overlooked. Despite a three-decade alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, Italy blanched at Austria’s infamous July 1914 ultimatum to Serbia, asserted its neutrality in the pending war, and ultimately declared war on its former allies ten months later. Much like the alignment transformations of Egypt and China radically reshaped the regional balance of power, Italy’s flip mostly subdued the Mediterranean as a war theater and permitted France to shift its entire force away from the Alps and into the Low Countries, stalemating Germany’s westward march. As one historian put it, “the Italians having ‘jumped the fence’ from the Triple Alliance to the Triple Entente, had made friends of enemies and vice versa.”

The Fable of Italian Treachery

Why were France and Great Britain able to flip Italy from an adversary to an ally in 1915? Italy’s realignment has typically been explained as an act of diplomatic bribery. Unsure of the outcome of the pending war and woefully unprepared, Italy felt trapped by its alliance obligations and sought to reap supplementary rewards in return for fulfilling

them. When her allies Berlin and Vienna proved unforthcoming, she turned to Paris and London, who eventually wooed her by promising far larger territorial spoils. Having first declared her neutrality on August 3rd, 1914, Italy spent the next eight months bargaining with both sides. When she finally denounced the Triple Alliance on May 3rd, 1915 and declared war on her former allies, the flip was complete. After Italian Prime Minister Antonio Salandra called for his country to attend to its “sacro egoismo,” Italy was forever branded as disloyal and selfish, having succumbed to naked self-interest and betrayed its allies at the mere promise of better rewards.

In his examination of wedge strategies, Timothy Crawford characterizes Italy’s flip as a cross between an inexpensive compensation wedge strategy, notably France’s efforts to improve relations at the turn of the century through trade and colonial agreements, and a costly endorsement wedge strategy, whereby both France and England promised Italy post-war territorial concessions in 1914-1915. Absent the Entente’s accommodations, Crawford surmises, Italy would never have realigned. As a contemporary Italian parliamentarian concluded, had Germany and Austria-Hungary offered Italy better terms, Italy’s leaders “would have accepted such a proposition and forced the country into the war on the side of Austria and Germany.” Randall Schweller’s identification of bandwagoning for profit behavior similarly describes Italy’s decision-making: attempting to ally with the prospective victor in order to reap rewards. According to this theory, Italy’s flip was opportunistic; she exploited the competition to appease her.

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372 Crawford, 171-173.
374 Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit.”
Yet, several basic questions muddle such a straightforward story. First, it does not explain Italy’s declaration of neutrality at the onset of the July crisis. At that time, Italy had neither sought nor received any compensation proposals for what Crawford would label a “dealignment” or Schweller would call “jackal bandwagoning.” It declared neutrality for three reasons: it did not believe its treaty obligations applied, it opposed Austrian gains in the Balkans, and it was not sure who would win the war. There is no evidence that Italy decamped from its alliance commitments in response to expected rewards for its betrayal.

Second, the Entente’s overture was not obviously superior. In the breach between when Italy denounced but before it declared war on its former allies, Austria-Hungary, under severe German pressure, submitted a counteroffer that came very close to what Italy had pocketed from the British and French. Moreover, whereas the Entente demanded Italy’s entry into the war, the Allies merely expected Italy’s continued neutrality. When properly comparing both quid pro quos, the Triple’s bargain actually appears preferable: Italy assumed far greater risk by entering the war for an only slightly better territorial reward. At best, Italy’s flip was a gamble and not the preordained consequence of accepting the best offer.

Third, a strict focus on the Entente’s accommodation strategy severely discounts the extensive existing tensions in the Triple Alliance. Born in a brief moment of panic following French moves in North Africa, the Italo-Austrian relationship was constantly wracked by clashing interests. Italy chaffed at continued Austrian control of Italia.

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375 Italy largely judged the Austrian offer as both insincere and too little, too late. Nonetheless, it demonstrates that a strict compensation comparison cannot explain Italy’s decision to jump the fences.

irredenta, territories with large numbers of ethnic Italians or Italian-speaking people that Austria kept after its war with Italy in 1866. Concerned about being outflanked, Italy also opposed Austrian expansion in the Balkans, protesting its annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 and fearing that Serbia would suffer the same fate. In reality, the Triple Alliance was a weak defense pact that no longer served Italy’s interests.

Finally, the story of Italy’s *sacro egoismo* also ignores the capacity of Italy’s government to change its stripes. Italian politics were notoriously rambunctious and governments were historically weak—there were nineteen governments in the eighteen years leading up to Italy’s flip. The most dominant political figure of the era, four-time Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti, was a proponent of continued neutrality. A disjointed or crumbling regime would have a difficult time surviving such a delicate diplomatic transformation. Unsurprisingly, the fate of the Salandra-Giolitti rivalry was a key driver of Italy’s flip.

Entente inducements alone are insufficient to explain Italian alignment behavior. Italy was certainly interested in territorial aggrandizement and sought to leverage her position to capitalize on the needs of both alliances. Yet, Italy declared neutrality prior to any discussion of compensation, the Entente’s bait was hardly superior, and the Triple Alliance had few institutions that would bind Italy to her Germanic allies. Moreover, Italy’s leaders were deeply divided, reflecting their struggle for political power. Italy’s acceptance of the Franco-British alliance offer was hardly predestined.
The Argument

Italy’s flip is best explained by two factors: regime cohesion and alliance dis-cohesion. First, the Italian regime became much more cohesive over time. Despite Italy’s reputation for weak and divided politics, true political power and decision-making authority was concentrated in the hands of fewer than four people. Much like Sadat and Mao had to oust their respective intra-regime rivals, Sabri and Lin, before executing a flip, Salandra bested Giolitti, the only man capable of seizing power from him. In order to bring Italy into alignment with its ex-adversaries, Salandra deceived his peers, prevented parliament from meeting, and conspired to create a showdown that left Giolitti politically debilitated. Only after Salandra had succeeded in consolidating his hold within the regime could he consummate the flip.

Second, Italy’s alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, prompted by short-term concern over France’s conquest of Tunis in 1881, was never strongly cohesive. In the Balkans, Italy was apprehensive about being encircled and opposed Austrian expansion further down the Adriatic coast. In North Africa, its colonial schemes were unsupported and even opposed by Germany. Finally, its designs on substantial Austrian-controlled territory, which it saw as rightfully Italian, were impossible to achieve absent confrontation. Without any alliance institutions to socialize the three countries or to help overcome quarrels, Italy scoffed at her allies demand that she mobilize for a costly war that would not serve her interests.

Weak alliance cohesion and strong regime cohesion provided Italy both the interest and the ability to flip sides. Although the Triple Alliance had long stopped

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serving Italy’s interests, it dissipated quickly after the costs of remaining allied became acute, as it did in July 1914. With those weak bonds shed, Prime Minister Salandra—initially viewed as a weak or caretaker prime minister, much like Sadat—had to first eliminate any rival power bases within the regime before becoming capable of realigning his country’s place in Europe. Unlike the flips of Egypt and China, where these two factors shifted sequentially, here they unfolded in parallel.

**The Triple Alliance: A Primer**

Founded in 1882, the Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy was a response to French moves in the Mediterranean. Already ensconced in Algeria for half a century, France had invaded Tunisia the year before, bringing French forces to less than 150 kilometers across the strait from Sicily and exercising control over a land where Italian residents outnumbered their French counterparts twenty to one. The lightning conquest also irked the prestige of the Italian Kingdom, which viewed Tunisia as part of its natural orbit dating back to Roman times. Seeking sanctuary, Italy allied itself with Germany, France’s greatest adversary, and her junior partner, Austria. The alliance became a pillar of Italian foreign policy.

For Italy, the alliance served three purposes. First, it countered French expansionism in the Mediterranean. Second, it bound her to Germany, whom Italy venerated for having achieved great power and modernity after having gone through its own unification process. Third, by allying with like-constituted regimes, it helped Italy’s

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379 Elisabetta Brighi, *Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics and International Relations: The case of Italy* (London: Routledge, 2013), 44.
conservative monarchists, who remained largely in control of the political class, to outwit her growing stable of liberal republicans, who idolized republican France.\textsuperscript{380}

Consisting only of eight articles, the Alliance was simple, defensive, and asymmetric. The parties pledged non-aggression and to defend Italy and Germany from an unprovoked French attack. Although no parallel obligation to defend Austria-Hungary existed, Article III stated, “if one, or two, of the High Contracting Parties, without direct provocation on their part, should chance to be attacked and to be engaged in a war with two or more Great Powers nonsignatory to the present Treaty, the \textit{casus foederis} will arise simultaneously for all the High Contracting Parties.”\textsuperscript{381} To narrow Italy’s scope of obligations even further, the parties added that the Treaty was not “directed against England.” Additionally, the Alliance had no mechanisms of institutionalization. There was no joint planning apparatus, no consultative machinery, and no common defense preparations. Contingent on each party’s interpretation of “without direct provocation,” the Treaty was, at best, a loose mutual defense pact against a putatively aggressive France and Russia with no clear pathway to activation.

Italy’s participation in the Triple Alliance was, in many ways, unnatural. It was not a Germanic people and, as one historian put it, her “interests in the Balkans run with Russia’s rather than with those of Austria and Germany, and her rivalry with Austria in the Adriatic is always acute.”\textsuperscript{382} Italian unification had even come at the cost of war with her northern neighbor; Italy had exploited Bismarck’s attack on the Dual Monarchy to extend her reach to other Italian-speaking lands. Although it managed to annex some

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Brighi, 44.
\item Fife, 539.
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Austrian territory, more than 800,000 Italian-speakers remained under Austrian rule in the Trentino, the Isonzo Basin, and Trieste, in what became known as Italia Irredenta for next half century.  

Revisions in 1887 and 1891 maintained the Triple Alliance’s basic defensive character, but also delineated a commitment to the status quo in the Balkans and support for Italy’s designs in the Mediterranean. Berlin and Vienna pledged not only to support Rome against potential French moves in Morocco, but also to back Italian designs in Tripolitania. Likewise, the two vowed to maintain the status quo in the Balkans and to both notify and compensate Italy if they forsook it. The Italian and German General Staffs also concluded a military convention in 1887 whereby Italy promised to send two army corps (200,000 men) to Germany in case of war with France. Fifteen years after its inception, the Triple Alliance consisted of a loose set of political understandings that had little immediate impact on its members’ behavior.

**The First French Flip Feeler**

France’s attempt to peel Italy away from Germany and Austria-Hungary began in the early 1890s. Unable to compel its allies to fulfill its promises, Italy grew frustrated at its own partners’ lack of support for its foreign policy. Under new Italian Foreign Minister Marquis Emilio Visconti-Venosta, Rome engaged Paris to see if the two southern European powers could reach a modus operandi in North Africa. In September 1896, the two signed a convention that tacitly recognized French sovereignty over Tunisia in exchange for French recognition of the special rights of Tunisia’s Italian

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383 Burgwyn, 8.
residents. In 1898, the two ended a ten-year tariff war that had devastated the Italian economy and had brought the value of French exports to Italy sixty-two percent below its peak.385

Soon thereafter, the two inked accords that marked a turning point in Italy’s perception of its alliance opportunities. In 1900, Italy recognized the French presence in Morocco in exchange for France’s promise not to contest Italian designs in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Two years later, French Ambassador to Italy Camille Barrère and Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Prinetti exchanged letters that secured a French loan for Italy and a free hand in Tripoli in exchange for Italian neutrality in case of any attack on France or of a French war due to direct provocation.386 Writing about his time as a junior counselor in the British Embassy in Rome during this period, future British Ambassador to Italy Sir James Rennell Rodd remarked that Italians were beginning to recognize their membership in the Triple Alliance was “dearly bought at the price of the permanent hostility of France and a pernicious tariff war. If Italy with her peculiar capacity for compromise could combine the maintenance of the Alliance with friendship for France her position in the world would be vastly improved.”387

The Prinetti-Barrère Accords were indeed France’s way to lull the Italians out of the German embrace. Barrère truly believed “the assistance of Italy can at the very moment turn the fate of battles against us.”388 Therefore, France should seek “to detach

385 Macdonald, The Man Who Saved France, Chapter II.
386 William I. Shorrock, From Ally to Enemy: The Enigma of Fascist Italy in French Diplomacy, 1920-1940 (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1988), 6. The letters were signed on June 30th, 1902, but purposefully dated November 2nd so as to conceal its proximity to the renewal of the Triple Alliance on June 28th.
388 Barrère to Ribot, 1 June 1890, quoted in Macdonald, The Man Who Saved France, Chapter II.
her from the Triple Alliance or to reduce her to powerlessness. Barrère understood how difficult that task would be, but was hopeful the flip attempt would bear fruit. Italy, he wrote to his boss French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé in May 1904:

> has given us further written guarantees which touch upon her participation in the Triple Alliance and which profoundly modify its original character…Italy is ceasing to be a military force at the disposal of the Germanic Powers. If a struggle broke out tomorrow between France and Germany, even if the latter were not the aggressor, no government would have the force, even though it had the resolution, to oblige Italy to join her forces to those of our adversary. It is one of those indisputable facts about which the will of a statesman and international pacts can do nothing.

Italy had seemingly secretly vitiated its standing alliance commitments.

Over the next several years, mutual goodwill continued to grow. In 1904-1905, the French navy docked in Italy and Paris offered humanitarian assistance following earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. In April 1904, French President Émile Loubet conducted a warm visit to the Italian capital and Paris ruptured its relations with the Vatican—the *bête noire* of Italian diplomacy—that July. Two years later, the two signed a neutrality pact, essentially keeping Italy out of a German war on France. Another economic accord was signed in November 1908. Over time, France felt secure enough to remove some forces from the Italian border.

Although the accords did not explicitly violate any terms of the Triple Alliance—indeed, Italy renewed its commitment to its allies in both 1902 and 1912—the Franco-Italian rapprochement meant that Italy’s membership in the Triple Alliance was becoming counterproductive. The historic 1904 reconciliation between France and England, known as the Entente Cordiale, further incentivized Italy to distance itself from

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389 Barrère to Ribot, 10 September 1892, quoted in Macdonald, *The Man Who Saved France*, Chapter II.
392 Hendrickson, 84.
its Central European partners. With Paris and London now allied in the Mediterranean, Italy could not advance its interests without their, at least tacit, acquiescence. Italy naturally wobbled when asked to defend the German position in Morocco at the 1906 Algeciras Conference for it could hardly support German claims without forfeiting its own privileges in Tripolitania that it had negotiated with France. Italy’s fickleness was a “humiliating disappointment for the Foreign Office in Berlin.”

Over the course of a single decade, Italy’s relations with France had been transformed. The raison d’être for her alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary had largely disappeared. Although she renewed its terms in 1907, reaffirming her commitment to defend Germany against France, she privately told France she would never fulfill it. Nevertheless, the flip stalled. Italian politics had become so chaotic that the risk of actually denouncing the Triple Alliance far outweighed any reward. During the prime years of Franco-Italian diplomacy, there were seven governments under six prime ministers in a three-year span. The regime was not cohesive enough to survive any major geopolitical break with Italy’s powerful allies.

**Balkan and Libyan Fallouts**

Just as its relationship with France had turned a corner, Italy became fearful and enraged by her Austrian partner’s moves in the Balkans. Vienna’s October 1908 annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina upset the delicate balance of power in the Balkans by solidifying control over Italy’s eastern Adriatic flank. Moreover, it was a clear violation of the Triple Alliance’s commitment to the status quo. According to the Treaty, any

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393 Fife, 538.
395 Hendrickson, 87.
adjustment “shall take place only after a previous agreement between the two Powers aforesaid, based upon the principle of a reciprocal compensation for every advantage, territorial or other, which each of them might obtain beyond the present status quo, and giving satisfaction to the interests and well founded claims of the two Parties.” 396 Not only had it violated its commitment, but the Dual Monarchy also had not notified Italy of its intent, taken Italy’s interests into account, or compensated Italy accordingly. 397

The annexation unnerved Italy and prompted her to reevaluate her alignment. Many Italian parliamentarians demanded that Austria cede parts of Italia irredenta, such as the Trentino or Trieste, as compensation. 398 Italian King Victor Emmanuel III griped to the American Ambassador that he was “more than ever convinced of the utter worthlessness of treaties or any agreements written on paper. They are worth the value of the paper. The only real strength lies in bayonets and cannon.” 399 Several months later, Italy signed the Racconigi Accord with Austria-Hungary’s rival Russia, whereby they agreed to prevent Austria from making further territorial gains in the Balkans. 400 Austro-Italian tensions even launched the two into a minor naval arms race, particularly after the Balkan crisis. 401

Austria’s Balkan belligerence was a major turning point for how Italy viewed the Triple Alliance. First, it demonstrated the Treaty’s worthlessness. Italy had adhered to it, Austria had defied it, and yet it made little difference. Second, Treaty aside, Italy was

398 Smith, Italy and its Monarchy, 177.
399 Ambassador Lloyd Griscom to Secretary of State Elihu Root, December 9, 1908, Department of State Numerical Files, No. 9744/3-4, National Archives cited in Renzi, 1414.
400 Renzi, 1416.
401 Hendrickson, 51-81. Ironically, all the shipbuilding the two had commissioned as part of the race then became part of their joint arsenal to be used against the French.
opposed to Austrian aggrandizement in the region. The two were fundamentally misaligned. Finally, Italy could no longer trust her Viennese partner going forward. Although it did nothing to counter the annexation, it would no longer be naively assuaged by mere commitments. The hardening of Italy’s attitude towards Austria would play a critical role in the subsequent Balkan crises.

Italy did, however, take away one positive lesson from Austria’s aggression: the time was right to challenge the frail Ottoman Empire for Libya. Italy’s invasion of Libya in September 1911—the Italo-Turkish War or Tripoli War—epitomized Italy’s now fraught position in the European alliance system. Rome’s actions incensed Germany, who had long maintained a strong relationship with Istanbul. Although Austria-Hungary was similarly displeased, it felt compelled to offer tepid diplomatic support to avoid the charge of hypocrisy—both powers were exploiting the weakening and fluid southern European theater to accelerate the Ottomans’ demise.\(^{402}\) Italy had painstakingly paved the way for French acquiescence over the previous fifteen years. The costly, yearlong campaign would finally fulfill Italy’s desire to be a colonial power just like its European peers.

The war had only made Italy’s already weak alliance more discordant. Germany’s and Austria’s less-than-full support made it woefully apparent that they were only nominal allies. Although the three conservative powers again renewed the Alliance in December 1912 and signed a naval convention the following year, they could no longer mask how little they valued Italy’s interests. Likewise, Rome had little intention of

\(^{402}\) Albrecht-Carrie, 5.
entering into a war against the Entente and the King even kept the British abreast of German military developments.\textsuperscript{403}

Not unlike the superficial alliance prolongation between Egypt and the Soviet Union after it had substantively fallen apart, Italy would not break with her partners unless the costs became more acute and she had secured a superior means of advancing her interests. In his memoirs, Salandra explained that the multiple treaty renewals had the ironic effect of recognizing and codifying, as opposed to resolving, “the real existence of points of friction.”\textsuperscript{404} The war reignited Anglo-French discussions over how to pry Italy loose from its alliance, but the scheme fell apart.\textsuperscript{405} While Rome, Berlin, and Vienna could see eye-to-eye in the Mediterranean and North Africa, they continued to clash over European affairs.

\textit{Run-Up to the July 1914 Ultimatum}

Even as it became increasingly concerned that it would be called upon to fulfill its alliance duties, Italy remained a steadfast ally on paper. As one historian wrote, “Italian diplomacy, promising military assistance, was reliable as long as military assistance was not really needed.”\textsuperscript{406} Rapprochement with France had helped, not hurt, its position in the Mediterranean, prompting many to question the value or necessity of an ostensibly anti-France alliance. Meanwhile, tensions with Austria-Hungary were rising on several fronts, as Italian and Austrian interests headed for direct clashes.

\textsuperscript{403} Smith, \textit{Italy and its Monarchy}, 194-195.
\textsuperscript{406} Bosworth, 231-232.
The continued dispute over the fate of the Balkans would soon inflame an even
dereeper schism between the allies. Despite its lack of action in 1908, Italy remained firmly
opposed to any further Austrian expansion and became agitated once again in July 1913
in what became known as the Second Balkan Crisis, or the “Serb war scare.” Deeply
distressed that the pro-Austrian William of Wied would lead the newly independent state
of Albania, Italy tussled with her Austrian ally for influence in what it deemed a critical
arena, including by sponsoring machinations of financial coups. Resentful of Austria’s
attempt to coerce it into supporting an antithetical policy, Italians once-again yearned for
the reunification of Austrian-controlled Italian-speaking territories under Italian rule. In
August 1913, the Austrian governor of Trieste issued the “Hohenlohe decrees” which
sacked all Italian citizens from public employment in the city and ignited a diplomatic
storm. Italy protested, but it had little leverage: the Alliance parameters were silent on
the treatment of ethnic Italians under Austrian rule. The Hohenlohe decrees, Salandra
later wrote, symbolized that Italy “had never been able to reconcile herself to the results
of the inglorious war of ’66.”

Nevertheless, mindful of its weak status and unprepared military, the Consulta,
the seat of Italy’s Foreign Ministry, ardently sought to repair relations to little avail. An
April 1914 summit between the two Foreign Ministers in Abbazia failed to find any
common ground and the relationship was more fragile than ever. Addressing Foreign

407 Bosworth, 232. Italy’s role in the crisis was publicly revealed by Giolitti over a year later in a blunt
attempt to keep Italy from flipping. The former premier had sought to demonstrate that tensions with
Austria need not precipitate Italy’s exit from the Alliance, but the incident backfired and caused colleagues
to see him as doing Austria’s bidding. Giolitti’s move is best seen in the context of his unsuccessful
campaign to remove Salandra from office and put off Italy’s entry into World War I.
408 Bosworth, 235-243.
409 Bosworth, 247.
410 Salandra, 25.
411 Bosworth, 251.
Minister Marquis Antonino di San Giuliano in a July 8th report, the Italian Ambassador to Germany wrote, “there is perhaps, not one single question where the interests of Italy coincide with those of Austria; where the policy of the one is not jealously watched and guarded against, even thwarted by the other…My only object in referring to these well-known facts is to confirm what Your Excellency said as to the difficulty of maintaining intact the bonds of the Triple Alliance.” The July Crisis merely brought the tensions to a boil.

**The Ultimatum that Cracked the Alliance**

On June 28th, 1914, Serbian nationalists assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in Sarajevo. Certain of an angry Austrian response, San Giuliano cautioned his ally against overreacting and demanded compensation were Austria to seek changes to the status quo. While Germany backed Italy’s call for Treaty-based compensation and Berlin and Vienna also agreed to notify Italy of any moves, it was clear that Italy was distancing itself from any potential actions. Writing on July 14th, Foreign Minister San Giuliano acknowledged that it was “possible, and perhaps even probable that in the not too far off future, we shall have to leave the Triple Alliance.” He would not “exclude the probability of our leaving the Triple Alliance in some years, in order to join the other bloc or to stay neutral, but today I would consider it a serious and dangerous mistake to weaken without absolute necessity the reciprocal bonds between us and our allies.” Woefully unprepared, both

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413 Albrecht-Carrie, 9.
414 San Giuliano quoted in Bosworth, 384.
415 San Giuliano quoted in Bosworth, 384.
diplomatically and militarily, to go it alone, Italy instead sought to temper Austrian demands in order to buy time.  

On July 23rd, after conferring with Germany but not Italy, Austria-Hungary issued its infamous harsh ultimatum to Serbia, all but ensuring war. The ultimatum shocked Salandra and San Giuliano. Whatever the result of the crisis, Italy’s interests would be harmed. If Serbia acquiesced to the ultimatum, it would become an Austrian vassal. If it defied the ultimatum, Austria would likely crush it. Neither outcome was positive for Italy, especially if Italy was compelled to join the war. “The reduction of Serbia,” Salandra later wrote, “with or without territorial diminution—to a state of impotence and vassalage signified Austria’s hegemony and a consequent spread of Germanism throughout the Balkan Peninsula, while for us it meant the loss of every possibility of expansion, and the loss of the Adriatic both commercially and strategically.” From Trentino and the Trieste onwards, “the German spirit would have surrounded, penetrated, suffocated us more and more. And the Kingdom of Italy, even if a party to their victory, would have been, at best, but the first of the vassal States of the Empire.” Its honor besmirched and its interests defiled, Italy now had to consider how to respond within the confines of its alliance.

Italy, Salandra and San Giuliano reasoned, could not be dragged into a war whose successful prosecution would be inimical to her interests. Instead, they outlined a treaty-based political strategy to both declare neutrality and demand compensation from its allies for their actions. The Triple Alliance, they wrote in a memorandum to the King,
did not obligate Italy to join her allies in war for neither Germany nor Austria-Hungary had been attacked unprovoked. Furthermore, Article VII of the Treaty guaranteed Italy proper compensation should its partners change the territorial status quo in the Balkans, even temporarily.\textsuperscript{420} The triumvirate settled on a policy of benevolent neutrality, but was keen to demonstrate this did not mean abandoning the Alliance.

Having set the course, San Giuliano instructed his ambassadors in Berlin and Vienna to tell their counterparts:

that if Austria-Hungary occupies territory, even temporarily, without our previous consent, she will be acting in violation of article 7 of the treaty of alliance. We announce accordingly our fullest reservations. I think it opportune further to observe that the step taken by Austria-Hungary, which is liable to create dangerous complications ought not, in my opinion, to have been taken without previous consent of her allies...It is our desire to pursue policies in accord with our allies, but as regards Balkan questions...this will not be possible unless we can count upon an agreed interpretation of article 7; failing which, our policy must be directed towards preventing territorial aggrandisement by Austria and must therefore concur with that of other powers which have the same interest.\textsuperscript{421}

If Italy’s demands were not met, she “shall be compelled to follow an independent policy in all questions affecting the Balkans, together with Albania, in regard to which special treaties exist between Italy and Austria.”\textsuperscript{422} If Austria would not comply with the Treaty’s terms, then neither would Italy.

Italy could not prevent Serbia’s diminution, but the crisis had finally unmasked how weak, inutile, and inoperative the Alliance truly was. Its “very foundations,” Salandra wrote in his memoirs, “though of thirty years’ duration, were lacking in solidity.” The pact “was no longer in touch with the evolution that had taken place.

\textsuperscript{420} Albrecht-Carrie, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{421} San Giuliano quoted in Leo Valiani, “Italian-Austro-Hungarian Negotiations 1914-1915,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary History} 1, no. 3, (July 1966): 116. A note on British English: since the meaning is evident to American readers, I have chosen to not insert the grammatical notification \textit{[sic]} after British spellings that would otherwise be incorrect in American English. The \textit{[sic]}s that appear in this manuscript also appear in the original source.
\textsuperscript{422} Salandra, 51.
meanwhile in international politics and in the relations of power, of trade, and of culture
constantly in process of formation and transformation throughout the European States,
and why it was therefore no longer consonant with the dignity and freshly-welded unity
of the Italian Kingdom.” Italian and Austrian interests were inimical not only in the
Mediterranean, but also in the Balkans and along their common frontier. Fundamentally
misaligned and without any concrete institutions or obligations, the Alliance had

crumbled.

Powerless to prevent the Balkan calamity, Italy remained unprepared to flip
against its former allies and sought refuge in its neutrality. When Salandra convened his
cabinet on July 31st, 1914, San Giuliano recapitulated why Italy would not be joining its
partners in war, but made clear that it was not abandoning the Alliance either. The Italian
army lacked materiel as basic as uniforms and was not prepared to engage Austrian
soldiers on the battlefield. Nonetheless, her neutrality did empower France to withdraw
300,000 soldiers from their common Alpine frontier and deploy them into the Low
Countries. Italy formally proclaimed its neutrality on August 3rd, six days after war had
been declared. Austria’s behavior, Salandra later declared, made Italy “free from
obligations; we had well founded claims to put forward; we could freely choose our
way.”

“Freely chose our way” also meant considering the post-war settlement. Italy
could hardly expect any spoils from its jilted partners were they victorious. The question
thus became whether, how, and how much to support the Entente. “The Triple Alliance,”
Italian Ambassador to the United Kingdom Marquis Imperiali wrote to Salandra:

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423 Salandra, 55.
424 Gooch, 61.
425 Salandra, quoted in Albrecht-Carrie, 14.
was conceived, concluded and invariably renewed as a pacific and defensive instrument. As long as it retained that character it was undeniably advantageous for us, indeed, almost a necessity, since it contributed to the preservation of European peace, held Austrian ambitions in check in the Balkans and avoided dissensions between us and the Dual Monarchy. These designs have now been frustrated by our Allies…Since our Declaration of neutrality, the Triple Alliance may be regarded as dead and buried. The vital interests of our country—it appears to me—impel us to do everything possible to prevent an Austro-German victory, which for Italy, indeed for the whole of Europe, would, in my opinion, be a fatal misfortune.\textsuperscript{426}

Discussions with France, England, and Russia commenced—the King had approved, in principle, the concept of an anti-Austrian intervention—but Italy would not yet engage in anything detailed.\textsuperscript{427}

\textit{Wartime Flipping}

Italy’s hesitance to enter detailed flip negotiations stemmed, in part, from its continued expectation of a relatively quick German victory. Enlisting in the Entente, as opposed to remaining neutral, would be sure to elicit a German response. The Battle of the Marne recast Italy’s approach. The unexpected Allied victory demythologized German invincibility to the point that Italy now believed the Entente would win the war. “It seemed to me,” Salandra wrote, “that the historic moment had arrived for attaining perfect national unity and for extending Italy’s boundaries to the limits consecrated by nature and tradition.”\textsuperscript{428} San Giuliano concurred, acknowledging that the only way to achieve Italy’s desired boundaries would be to declare war on Austria.\textsuperscript{429} The war’s stalemate persuaded Rome to open alignment negotiations, but it first wanted to explore whether it could extract concessions from Vienna and Berlin for remaining neutral.

\textsuperscript{426} Imperiali quoted in Salandra, 82-83.
\textsuperscript{427} Albrecht-Carrie, 15-16; Renzi, 1425.
\textsuperscript{428} Salandra, quoted in Renzi, 1423-1424.
\textsuperscript{429} Renzi, 1424.
By January 1915, little progress had been made. Italy reminded Austria that the terms of their alliance treaty not only obliged her to consult with Italy before any action, but also to compensate her if the status quo were altered in any way.\(^{430}\) Austria was still refusing, on principle, to grant Italy any compensation. In a note to his envoy in Vienna, Foreign Minister Baron Sidney Sonnino riled at Italy’s continued, even if nominal, membership in the Triplice. The war was being waged “with a finality and a direction absolutely opposite to the clearest and most evident interests of Italian politics in the Balkan Peninsula…Every alliance which is not fed by friendship and which does not contribute on its own account toward augmenting this friendship, must necessarily be barren and vain.”\(^{431}\) Seeking to defuse the situation, Berlin supported Rome’s demand for compensation under the terms of the Alliance, but had little effect on its junior ally.\(^{432}\) For Sonnino, the logic of Italy’s continued neutrality was fading.

Frustrated that two months had passed without a single offer from Austria, Italy withdrew from negotiations on February 12\(^{th}\), 1915. Sonnino wrote to the Austrian Ambassador:

> In the face of such an attitude persistently dilatory toward us, it is no longer possible now to nourish any illusion about the practical issue of the negotiations. Therefore the Royal Government finds itself constrained, for the protection of its own dignity, to withdraw every one of its proposals or initiatives for discussion, and to intrench[sic] itself in the simple interpretation of Article VII., declaring that it considers as openly contrary to the very article whatever military action Austria-Hungary would make from now on in the Balkans, be it against Serbia, against Montenegro or others, without there being the preliminary agreement asked for in Article VII.\(^{433}\)

\(^{430}\) The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sonnino) to the Royal Ambassador at Vienna, December 9, 1914, in *Italy’s Green Book*, Documents Regarding the European War, Series No. VIII, August, 1915, No. 93 (New York, NY: American Association for International Conciliation, 1915), 7-8.

\(^{431}\) The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sonnino) to the Royal Ambassador at Vienna, January 7, 1915 in *Italy’s Green Book*, 16-17.

\(^{432}\) The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sonnino) to the Royal Ambassadors at Vienna and at Berlin, December 20, 1914, in *Italy’s Green Book*, 14-15.

\(^{433}\) The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sonnino) to the Royal Ambassador at Vienna, February 12, 1915, in *Italy’s Green Book*, 36.
Even when it finally succumbed to German pressure a month later, Austria-Hungary’s belated concession to part, on principle, with some of its own territory yielded no breakthrough. Vienna’s proposal, according to Sonnino, was “too vague and uncertain” and “absolutely insufficient.” Six weeks of subsequent negotiations led nowhere. Austria’s obscure offers, Sonnino concluded, “do not seem to me to form a basis sufficient for an accord such as to create between the two States that durable and normal situation which would be our common desire.”

Stonewalled, Italy formally presented London with its demands for fully abrogating its alliance with the Germanic powers on March 3rd, 1915, crossing a line from neutral ally to disloyal one. Italy demanded a natural frontier in the Alps, complete control of the Adriatic through the annexation of most of the Dalmatian coastline, recognition of Italian sovereignty over the Dodecanese, as well as shares of Turkey in the event of partition. In exchange, Italy would fully commit to battle. Given that Italy’s demands would necessitate territory from both Austria and Serbia in the event of a victory, Russia initially pushed back, but eventually acquiesced after Italy agreed to a compromise on the Dalmatian coast.

Italy had notably demanded that Austria-Hungary commit to the principle of relinquishing territory it currently controlled—Italia irredenta—as opposed to territory it

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434 The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sonnino) to the Royal Ambassadors at Berlin and at Vienna, March 9, 1915, in *Italy’s Green Book*, 51.
435 The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sonnino) to the Royal Ambassador at Vienna, March 31, 1915, in *Italy’s Green Book*, 68.
436 The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sonnino) to the Royal Ambassador at Vienna, April 21, 1915, in *Italy’s Green Book*, 80. Interestingly, Sonnino appears to have never mentioned his parallel negotiations with the Entente to Italy’s Ambassadors in Berlin and Vienna. Intensely cautious and concerned of a leak, there is not a single reference to another alignment option in any communication authored by Sonnino in *Italy’s Green Book.*
437 Renzi, 1425-1426.
438 Albrecht-Carrie, 26; “Italian Memorandum of March 4, 1915” in Albrecht-Carrie, 329.
might control as a consequence of the war. When it later flipped, it remarkably did not issue a similar demand of France and England, who would offer it spoils from a vanquished Austria-Hungary and Turkey. Italy thus accepted an offer from the Entente that it had refused from the Triplice. The potential flip was less about actual territorial concessions and more about Italy’s misery in its current alignment.

The Treaty of London, a secret pact signed on April 26th, but concluded twelve days earlier, sealed Italy’s flip. In exchange for Italy’s commitment to declare war on its former allies, the Entente powers promised her Austrian-controlled Trentino and South Tyrol to the Brenner Pass, the Friulo-Julian area eastward to the watershed of the Julian Alps, as well as Trieste, Istria, and several islands lying off the Dalmatian coastline. Italy would also receive the city of Valona, control of Albania, a sphere of influence in Turkey, and a share in the partition of German African colonies. On May 3rd, Sonnino denounced the Triple Alliance, as promised, in a letter to his Austro-Hungarian counterpart. The Alliance, Sonnino wrote, had been good and useful, and Italy would have remained happy had Austria not so flagrantly violated it and subsequently failed to negotiate in good faith:

So flagrant a violation of the letter and the spirit of the Treaty not only justified Italy’s refusal to place herself on the side of her allies in a war provoked without previous notice to her, but at the same time deprived the alliance of its essential character and of its raison d’etre. Even the compact of friendly neutrality for which the Treaty provides was compromised by this violation…In this state of things the Italian Government must renounce the hope of coming to an agreement, and sees itself compelled to withdraw all its proposals for a settlement. It is equally useless to maintain for the alliance a formal appearance which could only serve to dissemble the reality of continual mistrust and daily opposition. For these reasons Italy, confident of her just rights, affirms and proclaims that she resumes from this moment her complete liberty of action, and declares as cancelled and as henceforth without effect her treaty of alliance with Austria-Hungary.

439 Albrecht-Carrie, 29-30. The agreement was meant to be kept secret until after Italy actually entered the war, but France leaked its contents three weeks after it was signed. Salvemini, 302.
440 Burgwyn, 22.
441 “Denunciation of the Triple Alliance, Telegram from the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Italian Ambassador at Vienna, May 3, 1915” in Albrecht-Carrie, 340-341.
Italy subsequently signed a broad military convention as well as a naval convention with its new allies, creating an allied fleet under French command as well as an Adriatic fleet under Italian command.\footnote{Burgwyn, 25.} Two days later, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary. The flip was complete.

Salandra and Sonnino presented Italy’s flip to their Cabinet as a \textit{fait accompli}. The Alliance had been abrogated, the pact with the Entente had been struck; there was no going back. A last ditch effort by the Central Powers had failed. On May 19\textsuperscript{th}, under heavy German prodding, Vienna reluctantly offered most of \textit{Italia Irredenta}, including the Trentino, rectifications along the western bank of the Isonzo, transformation of Trieste into a free city, and Valona.\footnote{Burgwyn, 28.} The counteroffer, and Giolitti’s attempt to exploit it to return to power, failed to dislodge or dissuade Salandra. Not only could Italy no longer trust Austrian promises after the debacle of its treaty violations, but also, even if it could, Italy still did not want to see Austrian predominance in the Balkans.\footnote{Valiani, 115.}

\textbf{Alliance Dis-Cohesion}

From its inception, Italy’s alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary was weakly cohesive. A mutual defense pact at its core, the Triple Alliance could only be activated in the case of unprovoked great power war. It delineated few actual obligations and did not stipulate any joint consultative, defensive, or offensive military or diplomatic strategies of any kind. Technically obliged to vaguely consider the interests of its comrades, each state was treaty-bound to act only if France attacked. In the two decades
prior to World War I, the treaty had little actual impact on Italian military or diplomatic behavior beyond codifying an extant fear of France. Were Italy’s perception of France to change, there would be little reason to remain a signatory.

Beyond countering French expansion, Italy did not share any other interests with its partners. In addition to possessing a large and volatile territorial dispute with Austria, Italy sought a foothold in North Africa, which was opposed by its Teutonic partners. It also opposed aggressive Austrian expansion in the Balkans. Finally, it desired to be treated as an equal amongst the Great Powers, whereas its allies continued to treat it inferiorly.

Finally, by the late 1890s, Italy’s original reason for joining the Triple Alliance, fear of France, faded. Over the subsequent decade, it diffused tensions with Paris and successfully enlisted France’s support in achieving a colony of its own, something denied to it by its own partners. The Franco-Russian alliance also pushed back on Austrian designs in the Balkans, with Russia supporting Serbia. Finally, the emergence of the Entente Cordiale transformed the balance of power in the Mediterranean. Even if France reemerged as a direct threat to Italy, there was little Austria could do against the combined naval strength of England and France.

At the outbreak of World War I, Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance in name only. Having reached an entente with France, she no longer shared any common interest with her putative partners. The 1914 July Crisis simply propelled Italy to act on the long-standing divergence of interests. Institutionally weak and fundamentally misaligned, the Alliance had long ceased to serve Italy’s goals, paving the path for Italy
to abrogate its treaty and flip to an alliance that would. The question became was it capable of doing so.

**Placeholder Politics**

Early twentieth century Italian politics were incredibly unstable and deeply divisive. In its thirty-two year membership in the Triple Alliance, Italy had twenty-nine different governments.\(^{445}\) A cross between republican France and England and conservative Germany and Austria-Hungary, Italian politics had massive popular involvement yet still retained a prime place for the monarchy and its traditional outlook. Revolution and unification from above meant that “the king of Italy headed a parliamentary monarchy lacking both the popular underpinning provided for the French parliament by the traditions of the Republic and the autocratic authority through which the Kaiser and his ministers governed the German *Reich*.\(^{446}\) Unlike China under Mao, a totally closed system, or Egypt under Sadat, a de facto military regime, Italian politics were more open and liberal, an experience that later fed Mussolini’s appeal to establishing order, stability, and continuity to the heretofore-chaotic experiment in Italian governance.

While Italian politics were incredibly unstable and divisive, Italian governance remained in the hands of the few, especially when it came to foreign and military affairs. The elite conducted diplomacy; information was privileged—even Parliament was

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\(^{445}\) In the first sixty years of its existence, the Italian Republic had thirty-seven governments. Unsurprisingly, Mussolini remains Italy’s longest serving prime minister in history after he moved to abolish the Parliament’s ability to call no-confidence votes.

\(^{446}\) Gooch, 6.
shielded from most developments.\textsuperscript{447} Control rested in the hands of the prime minister, the foreign minister, and the king, who all worked to impede any outside influence.\textsuperscript{448} The fate of Italian diplomacy was welded not to the national political agitation, but to the dynamic between key figures within the regime, the monarchy, and the dominant figure in Italian politics of the generation. In this case, regime cohesion is best measured by the fate of these rivalries.

Nicknamed the \textit{eta giolittiana}, early twentieth-century Italian politics were dominated by liberal leader Giovanni Giolitti. Elected prime minister five times over a three-decade career, he remains Italy’s second longest serving Prime Minister—after Mussolini—and was leader for eight of the eleven years immediately preceding the war. He oversaw continuous reforms, from achieving near universal male suffrage to infrastructure development to new labor and welfare laws. Although his poor stewardship of Italian foreign affairs, particular the Libya War and the 1913 Balkan crisis, led to his resignation on March 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1914, his shadow lurked over his successor. In the words of a contemporary journalist, Giolittism:

prevailed at the ballot-boxes and in Parliament. There was no force in the Chamber that could stand against the trained battalion which maneuvered so effectively at the word of command, and was quite ready to attack universal suffrage at one sitting and defend it at the next, if so ordered. It was an accepted axiom that no Cabinet could live without the support of Signor Giolitti, or in opposition to him. When he chose he took the premiership himself. When it suited him he would retire in favour of a successor on whom he thought he could rely. When the European conflagration came the “Dictator” was seventy-two; but age had not lessened his energy nor abated his influence. He was still the power behind the throne in Italian politics.\textsuperscript{449}

Giolitti expected only a brief and inconsequential absence from power. The conservative leanings of his handpicked successor, Antonio Salandra, he anticipated,

\textsuperscript{447} Knox, 162. 
\textsuperscript{448} Brighi, 52; Burgwyn, 13. 
\textsuperscript{449} Sidney Low, \textit{Italy in the War} (London: Longmans, Green And Co., 1918), 246-247.
would restore him to the premiership.\textsuperscript{450} By his own admission, Salandra understood his placeholder status for Giolitti, who, despite having resigned, still controlled the majority in the Chamber.\textsuperscript{451} In the interim, Giolitti’s Foreign Minister, the Marquis Antonino di San Giuliano, remained and could prevent any radical changes. A veteran statesman, San Giuliano had served as Foreign Minster and Ambassador to London and Paris prior to his reappointment at the \textit{Consulta} in Rome.

Salandra proved more formidable and astute than expected. He sought to reign in the parliamentary chaos brought about by Giolitti’s populism and establish political order that could facilitate Italy’s governing needs. He forged a new domestic coalition of conservative Catholics and rightist nationals. His government, ostensibly liberal, was actually more nationalist than expected.\textsuperscript{452} Salandra would operate within Giolittian constraints, but he quickly demonstrated that he would be no placeholder.

\textit{A Regime Divided}

When the July Crisis broke, the regime was deeply divided. A minority—republicans and some socialists—wanted to join France, while the majority—conservatives, monarchists, and the army—wanted to join Austria immediately.\textsuperscript{453} San Giuliano reacted cautiously to the Italian predicament. In a long war, the British navy could cut off Italy’s sea-borne supplies at will.\textsuperscript{454} Any war would only exacerbate Italy’s extreme vulnerability. The imbroglio threatened Italy’s security irrespective of the side it backed.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{450} Knox, 86.} \footnote{\textsuperscript{451} Salandra, 17.} \footnote{\textsuperscript{452} Burgwyn, 10.} \footnote{\textsuperscript{453} Smith, \textit{Italy and its Monarchy}, 199.} \footnote{\textsuperscript{454} Smith, \textit{Italy and its Monarchy}, 199.}
Salandra and the King concurred with San Giuliano’s assessment of Italy’s dilemma. To stand behind its allies meant exposing itself to British dominance in the Mediterranean in the name of advancing a policy—further Austrian domination of the Balkans—that it vehemently opposed. To flip to its presumed enemies would pit the woefully unprepared Italian army against the Germanic juggernauts, whom Italy believed would emerge victorious. The Army Chief of Staff had even admitted to the Cabinet that the army was unprepared to fight unless Austria was heavily committed elsewhere.\footnote{Gooch, \textit{67}.}

Navigating between Scylla and Charybdis, the trio settled, to widespread acclaim, on a policy of neutrality.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Italy and its Monarchy}, 199-200.} The government stood on firm legal ground—the alliance terms had not been properly invoked—and the Italian armed forces were wholly unprepared for combat. The King wanted to maintain good relations with both sides, especially as Italy continued to demand proper treaty compensation from its Allies. Vienna’s harsh reaction only further vindicated the decision and prompted the King to authorize Salandra to inform the British and the French that Italy would be willing to abandon its alliance and flip under appropriate circumstances.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Italy and its Monarchy}, 201.} For the moment, Salandra, with the King’s support, would entertain the concept, but was far from being able to implement it.

United in its neutrality, the regime remained divided over a potential flip. From the beginning, there were, in British Ambassador Rodd’s words, “a number of zealots who sought to bring Italy actively into line with Great Britain, France, and Belgium.”\footnote{Rodd, \textit{219}.} However, the hopeful Rodd was concerned about Salandra’s ability to control and lead

\footnote{Gooch, \textit{67}.} \footnote{Smith, \textit{Italy and its Monarchy}, 199-200.} \footnote{Smith, \textit{Italy and its Monarchy}, 201.} \footnote{Rodd, \textit{219}.}
his government into the Entente’s arms. In particular, San Giuliano worried Rodd. Inside the Foreign Ministry, “there was an influential group which believed in the necessity of placating Germany.” As, “Giolitti’s nominee,” San Giuliano “had been so closely identified with Triplicist policy” that Rodd doubted he would abandon his firm neutrality stance. However, Rodd assessed, the statesman had “a very plastic mentality, and at the opportune moment his unfailing resource would have found a ready way to liberate himself from former obligations.” Salandra had assured Rodd that San Giuliano understood Italy’s new set of circumstances, but “at that time the party of action still regarded him as an obstacle.”

While the regime remained divided over its predicament for several more months, San Giuliano’s death on October 16th, 1914 proved to be a turning point. Before he died, he and Salandra had convinced the King to advance flip negotiations with the French and British, even if their war aims were different. Although historians agree that he would have supported Italy’s eventual flip, his passing allowed Salandra “to form a more homogeneous administration.” In his eulogy of his former colleague, Salandra addressed the war fears and asserted that Italy must, first and foremost, be guided by its own interests—its “sacro egoismo”—not those of its would-be allies. The phrase became etched in Italian lore, falsely attributing Italy’s flip to its greed and disloyalty rather than to its assessment of its interests. Italy should align itself, Salandra was

459 Rodd, 220-221.
460 Renzi, 1424. Rodd was similarly confident. Rodd, 224.
461 Rodd, 227.
462 Rodd, 224-225.
arguing, according its own bearings, which were distinct from both the conservative and the republican powers.  

In San Giuliano’s place, Salandra appointed Baron Sidney Sonnino, a friend and parliamentary mentor. Also a conservative-leaning liberal, Sonnino had been the Prime Minister of two, three-month anti-Giolittian governments during the previous decade. The two were united by their common enmity of Giolittian populism. Although Sonnino had initially been “a zealous upholder of the Triple Alliance,” Austria’s aggression and the Tripplice’s coercion of Turkey to join the war had rid him of that outlook. By November 1914, he had concluded that intervening against Austria was Italy’s best path forward. In the November 5th cabinet reshuffle, Salandra and Sonnino also managed to weed out some of the more ardent neutralists. After almost eight months as prime minister, Salandra finally had complete control of his own cabinet.

Even as he consolidated control over his own government, Salandra could not author a dramatic change in Italy’s diplomatic position without contending with Italy’s premier political force: Giolitti. Giolitti openly preferred maintaining a strong and cordial relationship with Austria-Hungary and Germany. Any flip, with its accompanying declaration of war, would still have to be approved by the Italian Parliament, where Giolitti’s influence reigned. Salandra needed “at least the tacit support of Giolitti, whose mysterious influence over individual deputies and groups seldom failed, when he elected to exercise it, to rally some three-fifths of their number to his side.”

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463 Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, 203.
464 Burgwyn, 16.
465 Rodd, 228.
466 Renzi, 1425.
467 Burgwyn, 18.
468 Albrecht-Carrie, 20.
469 Rodd, 239-240.
defied expectations and united his government, but Giolitti still blocked him from any radical international moves.

Speaking in front of a pliant Parliament in December, Giolitti sought to accentuate Salandra’s weakness and foment a regime crisis. Austria, he shockingly revealed for the first time, had also requested Italian support for action against Serbia when he was prime minister during the previous Balkan Crisis of August 1913.\textsuperscript{470} Just like Salandra a year later, Giolitti had also rebuffed Vienna’s request and made similar arguments: Austria had not been attacked, there was no \textit{casus foederis}, and therefore the terms of the Triple Alliance did not apply.\textsuperscript{471} Yet, the crisis passed without Italy abandoning its alliance. In front of a friendly and captive audience, Giolitti was demonstrating that Italy could once again preserve its neutrality and its existing alliance. The Italo-Austrian relationship would and should survive the war crisis, he argued, as he sought to head off Slandra’s seeming slide into the Entente’s arms. More subtly, Giolitti hoped to discredit his upstart successor by example. Whereas he had successfully navigated the Alliance’s pitfalls sixteen months earlier, Salandra was bungling them.\textsuperscript{472}

The power play—purposefully performed in front of the entire Chamber, where Giolitti had more power, rather than the Cabinet—backfired. First, it was seen not as the wise counsel of an experienced statesman, but as an attempt to cynically circumvent the government. Second, having hidden from his colleagues the full scope of Austria’s aggressive intentions towards Serbia for over a year, Giolitti was no longer seen as trustworthy. Third, his dramatic public reveal had the unintentional effect of demonstrating that he cared more about maintaining a relationship with Vienna than

\textsuperscript{470} Rodd, 168-171.  
\textsuperscript{471} Rodd, 175.  
\textsuperscript{472} Valiani, 121-122.
Italy’s “sacro egoismo.” 473 Finally, despite knowing that war was a distinct possibility, Giolitti had not undertaken the necessary military preparations, leaving Italy impotent in the face of danger. The senior statesman had overestimated his own influence while underestimating Salandra’s cunning. His damaging performance had only strengthened his rival.

Having dodged Giolitti’s opening slug, Salandra moved to expose and sideline the only force that could conceivably unseat his government. He dismissed Parliament in order to prevent the Chamber from impeding with his diplomacy. 474 When it reconvened on February 14th, 1915, he asked for a confidence vote to further abate Giolitti’s influence in the Chamber. Two days later, Giolitti again tried to upstage Salandra by permitting the Tribuna’s publication of a letter addressed to his adjutant, where he wrote, “Given the current political condition in Europe, I believe that quite a lot [parecchio] can be obtained without war.” 475 Through the “parecchio letter,” Giolitti hoped to recast Italy’s alignment dilemma by making the nationalist—the “sacro egoismo”—case that Italy could achieve much of its aspirations through negotiations with Vienna and Berlin. Once again, his attempt to hamstring Salandra by taking a nationalist approach to neutrality boomeranged. Instead of evoking patriotism, the ploy painted Giolitti as an Austrian accessory. 476 To the people’s deep disdain, Giolitti’s letter signaled that Italy should be content with whatever Austria offered, hardly a nationalist position.

473 Denis Mack Smith, Modern Italy: A Political History (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 255.
474 Parliament’s two-month hiatus was not atypical; it periodically adjourned during international crises, such as during the months of preparation for the Libyan War or from the July Crisis until San Giuliano’s death in October 1914. Bosworth, 17-18.
475 Giolitti quoted in Burgwyn, 26.
476 Burgwyn, 27.
While simultaneously trying to portray Giolitti as a Viennese pawn, Salandra also worked to keep him, and other flip opponents, in the dark in order to present the flip as a *fait accompli*. In a meeting with Giolitti on March 8\textsuperscript{th}, he assured him that they were focused on negotiations and war would be a last resort.\textsuperscript{477} Five days after the Treaty of London was signed, Salandra and Sonnino even denied to their Cabinet peers that a treaty even existed.\textsuperscript{478} When Sonnino formally denounced the Triple Alliance to his counterparts in Vienna and Berlin on May 3\textsuperscript{rd}, the spurned allies now “rested their hopes on displacing the Government in office by intriguing with the opposition.”\textsuperscript{479}

With Italy divided between the *interventisti* and the *neutralisti*, Giolitti descended on Rome to challenge Salandra.\textsuperscript{480} Fearing his rival’s strangle on Parliament, Salandra urged the King to meet with Giolitti, with whom he hadn’t met for a year.\textsuperscript{481} When they met on May 10\textsuperscript{th}, Giolitti derided the catastrophic consequences of Salandra’s flip and sought to enlist the King in a plot to removed Salandra from power. Parliament, he told the king, was against joining the Entente, the army was unprepared, and Germany would still probably win—all of which would threaten the stability of the monarchy. Giolitti suggested that a parliamentary vote of disapproval could be used to walk away from the Treaty of London and reopen negotiations with Austria-Hungary and Germany.\textsuperscript{482} Such a maneuver, the King knew, would fell Salandra’s government, publicizing the clash between the two rivals and ultimately threatening the monarchy’s rule regardless.\textsuperscript{483}

\textsuperscript{477} Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, 206.
\textsuperscript{478} Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, 210.
\textsuperscript{479} Rodd, 247-248.
\textsuperscript{480} Gooch, 93.
\textsuperscript{481} Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, 211.
\textsuperscript{482} Smith, *Modern Italy*, 265.
\textsuperscript{483} Rodd, 251.
After over a year of living with Giolitti’s shadow, Salandra masterfully exploited his rival’s ultimate challenge to discard him once and for all. Using the King’s plight to his advantage, Salandra submitted his resignation on May 13\textsuperscript{th}, daring the King to appoint Giolitti and withdraw from the London Treaty. Shocked by the move, Giolitti panicked and shrunk from the challenge; he did not want actual responsibility for what would undoubtedly be a precarious and unpredictable diplomatic situation. None of Giolitti’s parliamentary allies wanted the position either. Three days later, according to Salandra, the King “refused my resignation. The die was then cast.”\textsuperscript{484} Giolitti withdrew and left Rome the next day.\textsuperscript{485} In intensifying the political crisis, Salandra had correctly gambled that Giolitti would wither and the King’s resolve would stiffen.

Having josted and ousted Giolitti, Salandra easily pushed Italy’s flip through Parliament. The Chamber reconvened on May 20\textsuperscript{th} for Salandra’s victory lap after news of his political triumph had become public. Parliamentarians discovered that not only had Austria made additional concessions in desperation only after the Alliance’s denunciation, but also that Giolitti was well aware of this. Once again, Giolitti appeared to have been doing Austria’s bidding.\textsuperscript{486} On the same day, Parliament, which was once in Giolitti’s pocket, voted 407 to 74 to give Salandra’s government full powers “in case of war.”\textsuperscript{487} Pressured by Salandra, aware of the King’s support, and abandoned by Giolitti, the deputies could do little but acquiesce. Three days later, the Chamber approved the declaration of war on Austria-Hungary.\textsuperscript{488}

\textsuperscript{484}Salandra, 644.
\textsuperscript{485}Gooch, 93-94.
\textsuperscript{486}Rodd, 251-252.
\textsuperscript{487}Smith, \textit{Modern Italy}, 266.
\textsuperscript{488}One last gasp of opposition remained. Under intense German pressure, Austria-Hungary sweetened its previous offer by proposing that Trieste could become a free city with municipal autonomy endowed with an Italian university. An Italian minister would be persuaded to resign, catalyzing a political crisis that


Conclusion

Even after having publicly weathered Giolitti’s challenge to his rule and neutered parliamentary opposition, Salandra still kept things very close to the chest. He had led Italy into war without the consent of and in opposition to the majority of the people and of Parliament, but with the full backing of the political regime. He never even revealed the full contents of the Treaty of London to Parliament, which included declaring war against all belligerents, not just Vienna.\textsuperscript{489} Having come to power as a weak placeholder, he set about convincing, coopting, sidelining, or confronting all major players.

This reading runs counter to the traditional understanding of Italian politics at the time. Italian politics are normally described as fraught and incredibly divided with a complete lack of cohesion. While this was largely true of the people, it mattered little to the actual cohesion of the regime. Popular opinion was regularly ignored, especially in matters of foreign affairs. An elite few made critical decisions about war and peace. Stalemate or rivals, not popular opposition, are what prevented policies from being implemented.

Only when Salandra had consolidated power and had full control over decision-making could he actually execute a full flip. For over a decade, Italian and Austrian interests had been misaligned, but weak regime cohesion meant that no Italian leader could risk such a flip without severe repercussions. Even after Italy blanched at Austria’s demands during the July Crisis, it would take her nearly ten months to repudiate the

\textsuperscript{489} Burgwyn, 38. Italy did not declare war on the Ottoman Empire for another three months, on Bulgaria for another five months, and on Germany until August 1916.

\textsuperscript{489} Rodd, 250-251; Valiani, 134.
alliance and flip to the Entente. Salandra had to first coopt his foreign ministers, persuade the King, outmaneuver Parliament, and emasculate Giolitti. Salandra may have told Sonnino in March 1915 that “noi due soli” (we two alone) could take Italy to war, but the pair first had to overcome the shadow influence of Giolitti as well as negotiate the assent of the King.\footnote{Knox, 162.}

The story of Italy’s flip resembles those of Egypt and China. Just like Sadat and Mao had to sideline their chief rivals, Sabri and Lin respectively, before feeling confident enough to undertake a geopolitical realignment, Salandra could not do so without outflanking Italy’s heretofore most powerful politician, Giolitti. Like Sadat and Mao, Salandra first sought to win intra-regime allies to his side before fomenting a direct regime crisis that allowed him to purge his prime opposition. As Salandra grew stronger, the flip grew more feasible.

Similarly, until Italy could find—and was capable of exploiting—a plausible new alliance, it continually renewed its existing alliance originally struck in 1882. Egypt had done the same with the Soviet Union. Despite deep dissatisfaction with the arrangement, Sadat actually extended the terms of the alliance and asked for more of it in order to buy time. Italy did the same. In both cases, the alliances lasted longer in name than in effect.

The Triple Alliance itself was a weakly cohesive alliance that became even less cohesive over time. It was a mutual defense pact with no outlined divisions of responsibility or military planning. It did not create any institutions, either at the political or military levels, or mandate any interim actions. Outside of a common defense against France, Italian and Austrian interests were never aligned, whether in the Balkans or in the Mediterranean. When relations with France improved, Italy truly began to stand astride
from its allies. Unless or until France attacked Italy’s partners unprovoked, there were no alliance obligations Italy was committed to undertake. Consequently, when Italian and Austrian interests began to diverge, there was little to hold the Alliance together.

Italy’s flip from the Triple Alliance to the Triple Entente may have been driven by a combination of fear and opportunity, but neither factor can explain how it actually transpired. Much like the story of other flips, both fear of its current ally and the opportunity to align with another were present long before the flip actually came to pass. The Triple Alliance’s weak cohesion, institutional and ideational, combined with the strong cohesion of the Italian regime to enable Italy to consummate a geopolitical realignment that had long been on the table. Unshackled by any robust alliance clamps and liberated from intra-regime political intrigue, Italy’s wartime flip proved consequential to the future of the European political order.
Chapter Five: Breaking the Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The United Kingdom after the War

The 1921-1922 Washington Naval Conference had a noble cause: to prevent a repeat of the calamity of World War I through the naval disarmament of the Great Powers. In his famous opening plenary speech on November 12, 1921, U.S. Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes “sank in thirty-five minutes more ships than all of the admirals of the world have sunk in a cycle of centuries.” The conference’s treaties ushered in an era of global arms control. Although leaders celebrated their grand accomplishments, the era is retrospectively remembered as the apex of American isolationism and for the collective failure to curb Japanese and German militarism.

The Conference did, however, achieve one lasting American objective: the severing of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, enabling years later the flip of Great Britain. For decades, the United States had seethed at Britain’s bond with Japan, which it saw as a major threat to its interests in the Far East. Britain ostensibly supported America’s 1899 Open Door Notes, which sought to maintain Chinese independence and territorial integrity while preventing foreign powers from establishing spheres of interest and commercial monopolies, but its alliance with Japan allowed Japan to steamroll over the American policy. Fueled by the dueling navies and competing territorial positions, the Anglo-American Pacific rivalry was tense and competitive. For the previous quarter-century, both navies had drafted war plans against the other in the Pacific, even after World War I. 

American efforts to flip Britain accelerated at the end of World War I.\(^{493}\) The victorious war effort fostered more intimate ties, but the United States remained frustrated that Britain was abetting aggressive Japanese behavior and worked to pry her out of Japan’s hands. America’s opposition was well known in Whitehall, yet successive British governments feared Japanese reprisals if it abandoned ship. Japan assuaged British fears only after it understood that the flip was a *fait accompli*. As one Japanese member of the Washington Conference delegation wrote, “we would only embarrass the British government if we insisted on the alliance being continued. It would be useless and senseless for us to try.”\(^{494}\) Signed in December 1921, the Four-Power Treaty finally dissolved the two-decade long Anglo-Japanese alliance.

In contrast to other cases, Britain’s flip was not completed for another two decades; it had dealigned from Japan, but had not realigned with the United States. Although London actively sought a formal alliance with its former colony, Washington shrank from offering any commitment, presaging its decades-long aversions to international military commitments. Quite happy with the decoupling of its major rivals in East Asia, the United States never actively worked to consolidate the flip. Notwithstanding the particular predicament of this case, the underlying dynamics of how the Anglo-Japanese alliance was terminated remain unaffected.


The Rules of Cohesion

Whereas the magnitude of the impact of the flip is evident, the factors behind it remain debated a century later. Britain’s transformation from an American rival to an American ally in the Pacific did not arrest Japanese imperial expansion, but it did recast the balance of power and shaped the outcome of World War Two. Yet, as one historian pithily eulogized, the flip “can be viewed as a bizarre anomaly, a brilliant diplomatic coup, or a Machiavellian maneuver to isolate Japan.”

Why was Britain able to flip its alignment from Japan towards the United States? What occurred in the aftermath of World War I that allowed longstanding American flipping efforts to finally bear fruit?

America’s half-flip of Great Britain can best be explained by the interplay of two variables, both brought about by the aftermath of the Great War: strong regime cohesion and weak alliance cohesion. Just as the alliance was becoming less and less cohesive, the British government was becoming more stable, united, and cohesive. After Japan’s 1905 defeat of Russia robbed the pact of its motivating rationale, the absence of any alliance institutions or permanent mechanisms of cooperation allowed the diverging interests of the two powers to drive them apart. World War I irreparably exposed how disjointed the alliance truly was. Lacking institutions, cooperation became so bitter that, by the end of the war, London confessed that the only interest the alliance could now serve was to restrain further Japanese expansion, which it now concurred was inimical to British interests.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister David Lloyd George’s remarkably cohesive and dominant post-war coalition government enabled it to move towards a realignment.

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without any adverse domestic political consequences. Whereas the Gallipoli disaster had severely weakened Prime Minister H. H. Asquith’s initially strong Liberal government and forced it into a rocky coalition with the Conservative and Labour Parties, Lloyd George restored the government’s stability and rode Britain’s victory over Germany to a crushing majority in the post-Armistice election. Decision-making was concentrated between himself and successive Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs Arthur Balfour and George Curzon—the latter two Conservatives—and he worked smoothly with each of them. To drive home how stable Lloyd George’s six year reign was, the following three governments lasted less than a year each. Initially desiring to renew its alliance with Japan, the Cabinet later became convinced of the merits of the flip. Its total unity and stability allowed it to change its approach without fear of consequences.

**Flippant Arguments**

Scholars have offered a number of arguments to explain why and how Great Britain flipped from Japan to the United States after the war. Some emphasize factors that broadly underpinned the historic transformation of relations between the two powers that began at the turn of the century, whereas others pertain specifically to the circumstance of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. The following review of these alternative arguments demonstrates why they are unable to fully capture why the flip succeeded.

First, many, such as Charles Kupchan, have argued that the cultural commonalities between Great Britain and her former colony best explain their historic rapprochement and alliance.\(^{496}\) After Britain internalizes that it could no longer compete with the United States, compatible social orders and cultural kinship, Kupchan argues, 

\(^{496}\) Kupchan, 73-111.
ensure the transition from erstwhile rivals to best of friends. While certain British elements, particularly among the Imperial Dominions, contended that their cultural resonance should lead to a formal alliance, a shared Anglo-Christian heritage had neither prevented the formation of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in the first place nor significantly evolved in the immediate post-war years. Shared race and culture featured prominently in political perceptions, but they failed to prevent a century-plus long Anglo-American rivalry or explain why relations blossomed after World War I as it did.

Second, the changing balance of power alone cannot explain Britain’s alliance shift. Balancing proponents contend that much like Britain allied with Japan to balance against Russia, it allied with the United States to balance against Japan. Bandwagoning advocates counter that Britain’s behavior in Asia—allying first with Japan and then with America—points instead to an inclination to align with the dominant force. Either way, both theories imply that Britain felt threatened by Japan, even though the record demonstrates, and British leaders acknowledged, that Tokyo had been a dutiful alliance partner and had never threatened Britain even once. In fact, as British officials nervously portended, Britain’s abrogation of its alliance is what would actually turn Japan into a threat, not the other way around. Over time, Japanese gains in Asia surely bucked British policy, but London did not beseech Washington’s aid in order to counter them.

Third, London’s slipping grasp over its Dominions has also been credited with paving the way for the American alignment. In particular, this line of argument propounds that Yankophilic Canada, who had the most to lose from an antagonistic America, pressured London into a new alliance. Simultaneously concerned by Canada’s vulnerability to both an American attack and American persuasion, London flipped in
order to maintain the integrity of its empire. However, not only was the Dominions’s attitude towards the Japanese alliance mixed—Canada was an opponent, while Australia and New Zealand were proponents—they did not possess enough leverage within the Imperial Council to force such a dramatic change in policy. In the end, London pursued a policy it had decided on prior to the 1921 Imperial Conference and the Dominions simply fell in line.

Fourth, the British realignment in Asia is occasionally explained by the shared Anglo-American interests in the region. Beyond their military alliance to defeat Germany in Europe, the two advocated for the Open Door in China, the defense of their possessions in Asia and the Pacific, as well as the protection of sea-lanes vital to commerce. However, once again, these interests were mutual even in the early years of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the war hardly changed them. Successive British governments openly admitted that its interests in Asia were far more aligned with the United States than with Japan. It opposed all Japanese appropriations of Chinese territory. If Anglo-American interests were more naturally aligned from the moment Britain even entered its alliance with Japan, then certainly alignment of interests alone cannot explain why it subsequently ended that alliance.

Finally, Britain may have flipped as a result of an American flipping—or wedge—strategy. Elucidated by Crawford, a wedge strategy explanation focuses on whether and how the United States sought to either accommodate or coerce Britain to flip sides. It presumes that not only did the United States have such a strategy, but that it also executed it successfully. Washington’s dissatisfaction with the Anglo-Japanese alliance was certainly well known to London, but there was never a consistent and coordinated
effort to flip Britain. Moreover, the Harding Administration did not actually offer Britain any tangible concessions to procure its realignment. In fact, it even refused to forgive British war debts, prompting the fall of the Lloyd George government soon afterwards. London only half-flipped precisely because Washington never proposed a formal alliance. If the United States never implemented a wedge strategy, then surely a wedge strategy alone can hardly explain Britain’s flip.

Origins of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance

The Anglo-Japanese alliance was born out of Japanese strength, Chinese weakness, and British imperial exhaustion. Japan’s 1894-95 defeat of China had opened the floodgates to European encroachments on Chinese territory. Two years later, both Germany and Russia occupied swathes of Chinese territory. In the spring of 1899, Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain wrote to Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, “…have you considered whether we might not draw closer to Japan? It seems to me that they are rapidly increasing their means of offence and defence and in many contingencies they would be valuable allies.”497 Chamberlain also approached the Japanese Minister in London, but little came of the idea as both countries sought to accommodate rather than counter Russia.498

The 1900 Boxer Rebellion rekindled the concept. Tied down by the Boer War, Britain asked Japan for assistance in protecting its foreign legations in Beijing from the revolts. The provision of Japanese troops helped open British eyes to the advantages of

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an alliance with such an able regional power.\footnote{Towle, 4.} Concerned both about Russia’s Far East advances and about its inability to independently project the power necessary to counter it, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Marquess of Lansdowne approached the Japanese Minister to Great Britain Baron Hayashi about a possible partnership on July 31st, 1901.\footnote{Zara S. Steiner, “Great Britain and the Creation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance,” \textit{The Journal of Modern History} 31, no. 1 (March 1959): 28.} Treaty negotiations began less than three months later and were concluded on January 30th, 1902.\footnote{Inouye Yuichi, 154.}

Although the two powers pledged to defend each other, the alliance’s terms were so weak that they hardly troubled the United States. The preamble affirmed the Open Door—the American policy of equal and unfettered commercial relations with China announced two and a half years earlier—but it also recognized the signatories’ rights to protect their respective special interests in China and Korea. Each pledged to maintain neutrality if the other was involved in war and agreed to not enter into separate agreements that could harm the alliance, but the alliance only prescribed assistance if the other was attacked by two other powers combined. In practice, therefore, only a combined Franco-Russian attack would activate the alliance. Combined, Britain and Japan had eleven battleships in the Far East whereas France and Russia had nine.\footnote{Christina L. Davis, “Linkage Diplomacy: Economic and Security Bargaining in the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902-23,” \textit{International Security} 33, no. 3 (Winter 2009): 157.} The alliance proved so unobjectionable at the time that U.S. Secretary of State John Hay noted to the Japanese government “that the purpose of the Agreement is entirely in accord with the desire of the United States. We have no doubt that the Agreement is consistent not only with the policy of the United States, but also with the declared

\footnote{Towle, 4.}
policies of other Powers.” Unlikely to truly be invoked, the alliance was a non-
development to the United States.

Britain had ended its “splendid isolation” out of imperial weariness. It simply
could not maintain an independently strong naval force in the Far East as a result of its
other global deployments. Its two-power naval standard policy was already slipping and
it had become increasingly concerned about the German naval building program. In what
became a recurring dynamic, more urgent threats closer to home would prompt Britain to
lean on Japan more and more.

The Alliance’s Evolving Rationale

Japan’s drubbing of Russia in the 1904-05 war fundamentally changed the nature
of the alliance. Britain remained neutral during the war—the alliance did not require it to
assist Japan against only a single belligerent—but it did refuse all coaling facilities to the
Russian Baltic Fleet as it sailed around world. Japan’s destruction of the Russian fleet
ended Moscow’s ambitious Pacific designs. Consequently, the alliance had largely lost its
original shared rationale.

The war’s results notwithstanding, London and Tokyo revised and extended the
alliance a full two years before its expiration. Under the revised treaty, Japan agreed to
include British India under the scope of the alliance while Great Britain recognized
Japan’s right to protect its interests in Korea, a tacit approval of Japanese annexation.

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Alliance and Russo-Japanese War (Tokyo, Japan: Kajima Institute of International Peace, 1978), 73.
505 Lowe and Dockrill, 278.
506 Davis, 164.
Additionally, the renewal reduced the threshold for providing military assistance to an attack from a single belligerent. While Britain played no role in Japan’s crushing of Russia, it wanted to deter a defeated Russia from renewing hostilities in Northeast as well as Central Asia. President Theodore Roosevelt even assured the British government that the revised pact would not cause consternation in the United States.

The revised alliance did little to address its lack of cohesion. It did call for naval consultations, but little actually occurred. Under the Yamamoto-Fisher understanding of 1907, the Royal Navy was supposed to help train Japanese sailors, but the Foreign Office’s exuberance for the alliance was not matched by the Admiralty’s, which, already concerned by Japanese numerical superiority, refused to help Japan close the gap on its technological and operations prowess. At this point, the Royal Navy kept only five cruisers in Far East, making England even more reliant on Japanese firepower.

The development of the Triple Entente in 1907—the Anglo-Franco-Russian counter to the Triple Alliance—further shattered any shared interests between Britain and Japan. In parallel, Japan and Russia also signed a series of treaties—in 1907, 1910, and 1912—that doused any remaining war embers. With Russia now friendly as opposed to threatening, London sought to convert the alliance for another purpose: the need to respond to the German naval program closer to home. The German position in the Far

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507 Davis, 164.
508 Lowe and Dockrill, 280.
510 Ian H. Nish, *Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1908-23* (London: The Athlone Press University of London, 1972), 45. Although it later became a vehement proponent of the alliance with Japan, Australia was so concerned that the British withdrawal would make Japan predominant that it successfully lobbied in 1909 for it to be allowed to maintain its own Navy that could not be transferred elsewhere where Australian interests were not at stake.
511 The treaties were subordinated to the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the British were informed every step of the way. Nish, 21-22.
East did not directly trouble Britain, but its alliance of Japan enabled it to relieve as much of its Far Eastern fleet as possible for duty in the North Sea. In a few short years, the British rationale for its alliance shifted from countering Russia to maintaining its Far East position at reduced cost so as to counter the rise of Germany.

Despite increasing discomfort with Japanese actions in China, the British government, under the direction of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Sir Edward Grey, believed it was a low price to pay for the alliance’s benefits. At the helm of the Foreign Office for eleven years from 1905-1916, Grey was a realist. He believed Japanese expansion was inevitable and even understandable, but that it did not threaten Britain’s core interests. Grey largely discounted American and Canadian fears of Japanese immigration, believing Japanese expansion was concentrated to Korea and Manchuria. He also minimized the possibility of a Japanese-American clash. “The Americans talk angrily,” Grey said in July 1907, “but they have no means of getting at the Japanese, unless they build a much larger fleet. It is true that Japan cannot materially hurt the Americans, except in the Philippines which would be no great loss, but unless America could bring Japan to her knees, she would lose prestige and Japan would gain it.” Grey believed that Britain’s alliance with Japan would never come at the cost of a friendship with America.

Nevertheless, as Britain was increasingly becoming the junior partner in the alliance, the British Foreign Office began to justify its alliance as its best means of moderating or restraining Japanese behavior in China. By 1910, London had halved the number of battleships and cruisers in Far Eastern waters that it had deployed when it

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512 Nish, 6.
513 Nish, 7.
514 Grey’s minute on MacDonald to Grey, July 10, 1907 quoted in Nish, 23.
originally inked the alliance treaty in 1902. That same year, Japan’s fleet consisted of
eleven modern battleships, thirteen armored cruisers, and seventeen protected cruisers,
whereas Britain transferred an additional five battleships from China back home to
reinforce the Channel fleet. A June Foreign Office memorandum epitomized the
British alliance dilemma:

If our alliance is terminated in 1915, Japan will have her hands free to act in the Far East without
restraint or control by us. It is possible that we might in that case find the Japanese fleet arrayed
against us in the Pacific or allied with that of some other Power. These are changes that are
unpleasant to contemplate and I believe that in 1914 it will still be our policy to be in alliance with
Japan.

Britain was cognizant that the alliance was actually imperiling its interests, but also
gravely concerned that abrogating it could be more damaging. Acknowledging that its
alliance was counterproductive, it had yet to conceive of an alternative.

*Initial Flip Attempt Fails*

Just as British anxiety over its Japanese ally was building, the United States
inquired about British interest in concluding a general arbitration treaty that would help
resolve a series of outstanding bilateral issues. Although such a treaty would conflict
with its Japanese alliance, London salivated at the opportunity and did not want to wait
five years for its alliance with Japan to expire. Instead, it engaged Tokyo to see if there
was a way for it to satisfy the American proposal without diminishing its existing treaty.
Japan refused to be a signatory to the arbitration treaty, but it sought to exploit Britain’s

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515 Lowe, 17-18.
516 Nish, 46; Davis, 165.
517 Minute by Charles Hardinge, June 13, 1910, quoted in Nish, 51.
518 Nish, 41.
predicament by proposing a large-scale revision of the alliance.\textsuperscript{519} It was a shrewd move by Japan to codify many of the geopolitical gains of the past half-decade.\textsuperscript{520} Tokyo conceded something remote (Britain’s participation in a conflict with America) in order to gain something tangible (British recognition of the Korean annexation).

The July 1911 Anglo-Japanese Treaty revision and renewal cemented some Japanese geopolitical dividends, while also diluting mutual alliance obligations. The new version removed references to Korea and India and added a vaguely worded clause that would exempt British participation in any war against a power with which it had an arbitration treaty, i.e., the United States.\textsuperscript{521} In a conversation with the Japanese Ambassador to Great Britain, Grey extolled the alliance’s virtues: “if the Alliance had lapsed, an element of instability would have been introduced which would have made it impossible to preserve the settled state of things that had now been established.”\textsuperscript{522} At the 1911 Imperial Conference, the British Dominions unanimously echoed Grey’s strong defense of the alliance extension, on both security and financial grounds.\textsuperscript{523}

Despite Japanese acquiescence, the arbitration treaty signed with the United States in August 1911 was initially stillborn. The U.S. Senate had ratified the treaty in such a way that eviscerated its basic premises, rendering it unacceptable to both governments. With the presidential election coming up in fall, the whole effort collapsed and was only revitalized by Wilson’s inauguration in early 1913.\textsuperscript{524} On September 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1914, Great Britain and the United States signed a Special Commission Treaty, also

\textsuperscript{519} Nish, 44.
\textsuperscript{520} Lowe, 34.
\textsuperscript{521} Agreement Between the United Kingdom and Japan, July 13, 1911 in Lowe, 49-50.
\textsuperscript{522} Grey quoted in Lowe, 51.
\textsuperscript{523} Nish, 62-63.
\textsuperscript{524} Nish, 77-78.
known as the Bryan Peace Commission Treaty, and ratified it on November 10\textsuperscript{th}. Unlike an arbitration treaty, the Commission could investigate disputes, but only issue non-binding findings.\textsuperscript{525} Nevertheless, Grey informed the Japanese that “the General Arbitration treaty did contain a provision for a commission of enquiry; the Peace Commission treaty is therefore a method of giving effect to a part, and in practice the most operative part, of the General Arbitration Treaty.”\textsuperscript{526} Although Japan never formally responded to the Foreign Office’s interpretation, London considered the matter closed. A debate about its worthiness did not arise until 1920, when the discussion pivoted over possible renewal of the alliance.\textsuperscript{527}

The Anglo-American Treaty and the continued Anglo-Japanese dissonance did little to halt the decline in Britain’s Far Eastern position. Following the 1911 Chinese Revolution and subsequent abdication of the emperor, Britain’s support for the new Chinese republic only further inflamed Tokyo. A systematic examination of Imperial defense needs in the Pacific concluded that only Japan posed a potential threat to British Dominions and colonies.\textsuperscript{528} With the German threat clearly paramount, a fact reinforced by the Agadir Crisis that summer, Britain needed to reduce its Far Eastern maritime presence without alienating Japan, who could wipe out British positions.\textsuperscript{529} When Winston Churchill became the First Lord of Admiralty in October, he accelerated the shift of British ships from Far East to Europe. By 1913, Britain’s China squadron was not only smaller than Japan’s, but also than Germany’s China fleet as well.\textsuperscript{530}

\textsuperscript{525} Nish, 110.
\textsuperscript{526} Grey to Inoue, September 21, 1914, quoted in Nish, 111.
\textsuperscript{527} Nish, 112.
\textsuperscript{528} Nish, 51.
\textsuperscript{529} Davis, 173.
\textsuperscript{530} Nish, 86.
World War I marked a major turning point in the alliance. Japan entered the war at Britain’s request, yet the very nature of its assistance exposed how discordant and incongruous the alliance had become. Japan eliminated the German presence in China, destroyed the German Pacific fleet, ferried British Imperial troops to the main war theater, protected British merchant ships, and even contributed a submarine force in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the state of the alliance was the worst it had ever been. Japan exploited Britain’s request for assistance to pursue its own expansionist goals, which further undermined British interests in Asia. By war’s end, whatever cohesion had been left in the alliance was liquidated. In the words of one historian, “in place of amity there was growing divergence and distrust.”

In the early days of the war, the British government debated leveraging Japan’s assistance. The alliance had no prearranged wartime contingency plans. The British Admiralty recognized it did not have the strength necessary to blockade the German base at Tsingtao, police shipping lanes, and pursue German vessels in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Months earlier, Churchill had publically announced to the South Pacific Dominions that Britain expected Japan to be responsible for their wartime defense, but nothing had been planned. However, fearful of Japan’s ability to exploit the situation to make further gains in Manchuria, Grey initially opposed invoking the alliance, but his hand was forced when Germany mobilized its reserves at Tsingtao and sent warships into

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531 Lowe, 302.
532 Nish, 141.
533 Nish, 118.
534 Lowe and Dockrill, 281.
the Pacific. On August 7th, 1914, Grey requested assistance from Japan to protect British commerce in the Pacific from German armed merchant cruisers while the British Navy went after German warships near China. Although limited in scope, the request was pivotal for it would entail a Japanese declaration of war on Germany.

Thirty-six hours later, Japan agreed to enter the war, but rebuffed, to its displeased ally, any restrictions and declared that it would pursue German forces with full vigor on land and at sea. When Germany refused to respond to Japan’s demand for the unconditional withdrawal of its fleet and surrender of its territories, Japan declared war on August 23rd, 1914. There was little Britain could do to restrain its ally. “If Germany was beaten,” Grey told his colleagues a few days before the Japanese declaration of war, “France, Russia and ourselves would naturally get compensation in parts of the world other than China. The only compensation that Japan would get would be in the region of China. It would therefore be unfair for any of us to put forward claims, depriving Japan of compensation for the blood and treasure that she might have to spend.” The dispute marked the first major diplomatic clash between the two allies, but a reappraisal of relations would have to wait until after the war.

Britain’s vain attempt to prevent Japan’s expected territorial acquisitions ironically led to the alliance’s sole joint military operation, an attack on the German base at Tsingtao. The British contingent was tiny—1,650 South Wale Borderers and a detachment of Sikh troops compared to 30,000 Japanese soldiers—and fought under

536 Nish, 118.
537 Nish, 123.
538 Minute by Grey on a draft telegram by Alston to Greene, August 20, 1914; Grey to Greene, August 22, 1914, quoted in Lowe, 195.
Japanese command.\textsuperscript{539} Japan blockaded the area on August 23\textsuperscript{rd}, landed troops on September 2\textsuperscript{nd}, and surrounded Tsingtao by October 12\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{540} Most of the German fleet had evacuated before the blockade had been implemented, but the combined German and Austro-Hungarian force surrendered the garrison on November 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1914.\textsuperscript{541} To summarize, Britain voluntarily committed its soldiers to battle under a Japanese flag to fulfill a mission that it had tried to prevent. It even negotiated a delicate compromise with China to permit Japanese troops to traverse Chinese territory to attack the German fortress.\textsuperscript{542}

By December 1914, Japan had eliminated virtually the entire German presence in the Far East and the Pacific. It had conquered the German-leased territory in China and German Pacific islands and the German fleet, chased out of the Pacific, was defeated near the Falkland Islands in early December. The Japanese Navy continued to suss out remaining German raiders through the war, but, in a few short months, it had become the predominant force in the Western Pacific. Undoubtedly valuable to the war effort, Japanese operations were, paradoxically, undermining the alliance.

Nevertheless, even as the alliance’s cohesion had collapsed, British officials continued to abet Japanese behavior that undermined British interests. Britain notably muted its reaction to Japan’s notorious Twenty-One Demands to China in January 1915. As Grey put it, “my desire is to be able to say that there is nothing in Japanese action which conflicts with the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and that I am prepared to justify

\textsuperscript{539} Saxon, 68.  
\textsuperscript{540} Nish, 135.  
\textsuperscript{541} Saxon, 70.  
\textsuperscript{542} Lowe, 193.
Japanese action or, if required, to support it.”\textsuperscript{543} Private threats succeeded in Japan dropping some of the demands, but London realized how little leverage it truly had.\textsuperscript{544} As Grey wrote to the British Envoy to China in early 1916, had London not condoned Japan’s expansion in northeast China, “it would have been clearly to Japan’s advantage to throw in her lot with Germany. Japan is barred from every other part of the world except the Far East and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance cannot be maintained if she is to be barred from expansion there also and if we are to claim the German concessions in China as well as taking German colonies in Africa and elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{545} The alliance had suffered an irreparable rift, but Britain’s options could only be reassessed after the war was over.

In the meantime, Japan capitalized on Britain’s vulnerability. Still fuming after an initial September 1915 appeal to Japan to send troops or a fleet to Europe was refused,\textsuperscript{546} London petitioned her again in January 1917 to send two light cruisers to the Indian Ocean to hunt German raiders and a flotilla of destroyers to Malta to stalk German and Austrian submarines in the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{547} Sensing another opportunity, Japan consented to the request, but asked Britain to support Japanese claims to the German-controlled territories in China and the Pacific.\textsuperscript{548} Uneasy about the quid pro quo, Balfour responded that Britain would be willing to do so if Japan “will, in eventual peace settlement, treat in same spirit Great Britain’s claims to German Islands South of Equator.”\textsuperscript{549} Britain was in such dire need of assistance in Europe, Balfour wrote to the

\textsuperscript{543} Grey to Greene, March 9, 1915, quoted in Nish, 154.
\textsuperscript{544} Lowe and Dockrill, 290.
\textsuperscript{545} Minute on Jordan to Grey, February 15, 1916, quoted in Lowe, 308.
\textsuperscript{546} Nish, 150-151.
\textsuperscript{547} Nish, 203.
\textsuperscript{548} Tate and Foy, 532-534.
\textsuperscript{549} Balfour to Greene, February 14, 1917, quoted in Nish, 207.
British Ambassador to Japan, that it was wiser to recognize Japan’s *fait accompli* in China to secure actual Japanese naval assistance where it mattered.\(^{550}\)

That spring, Japanese warships began escorting British troop transports through the Suez Canal and conducting anti-submarine operations in the Mediterranean.\(^{551}\) At its peak later that year, the Japanese Mediterranean flotilla, its first and only in its history, consisted of seventeen warships and even suffered casualties.\(^{552}\) Over course of war, the Japanese squadron protected 788 allied ships in the Mediterranean, including 700,000 troops, and saw 34 engagements with German and Austrian submarines.\(^{553}\) The British were exceedingly pleased with the Japanese performance. Summarizing general opinion, Churchill said he “did not think that the Japanese [squadron] had ever done a foolish thing.”\(^{554}\) The British governor of Malta, the base of the Japanese flotilla, praised the Japanese and said, “God grant our alliance, cemented in blood, may long endure.”\(^{555}\) Japanese forces remained in the Mediterranean until May 1919.

American entry into the war in April 1917 restored some balance in the Anglo-Japanese relationship. It obviated the need for direct Japanese assistance in Europe, but it also introduced the defining dilemma of the post-war order: how could Britain partner with the United States without provoking Japan? Balfour sought to parlay America’s entry into a wartime maritime defense treaty. “It is quite true that there is no logical incompatibility,” Balfour wrote, “between our actual Treaty with Japan and this suggested Treaty with America. Both are defensive. If Japan attacked America, we

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\(^{550}\) Nish, 208.
\(^{551}\) Saxon, 79.
\(^{552}\) Saxon, 80. On June 11th, 1917, an Austrian submarine torpedoed the Japanese destroyer *Sakaki* near Crete. Despite heavy damage and casualties, the ship limped into port in Piraeus, Greece.
\(^{553}\) Saxon, 81.
\(^{554}\) Churchill quoted in Saxon, 82.
\(^{555}\) Lord Methuen quoted in Saxon, 82.
should certainly, if appealed to, come to America’s assistance; while, if America attacked Japan, we should be under no Treaty obligation to join in the attack.” The best way to avoid such a scenario would be “to try to associate Japan from the beginning with the new arrangement.” He advocated Japan becoming a formal member of the Entente—until now it operated solely under the Anglo-Japanese treaty—but could not interest either of its allies. In secret negotiations with Woodrow Wilson’s personal emissary, Balfour tried to snare an American pledge to construct large numbers of desperately needed escort ships in return for a promise of British help in case of a Japanese-American conflict, but the two future allies quashed the putative negotiations of fear of alienating Japan.

Balfour’s frank acknowledgement that Britain would side with the United States in any Japanese-American war was a turning point in how Britain viewed it strife-ridden alliance. In an extensive August 30th, 1917 memorandum from Sir Conyngham Greene, the British Ambassador to Japan, assessed the main drawbacks of the Anglo-Japanese alliance:

1. The arrogance, opportunism and selfishness of Japan’s foreign policy.
2. Japan’s aspiration to the hegemony of the Far East.
3. Japan’s philandering with India, and her attitude towards Indian sedition.
4. Japan’s economic claims (much resented by the Indian Government) in that country, including shipping-competition, coasting trade, Customs, duties, etc.
5. Japan’s alleged aspirations in regard to the Netherlands Indies, carrying with them a menace to Hong-Kong, the Straits settlements and Singapore, the greatest British trading port (I think) in the world.
6. The suspected designs of the Militarist party in Japan against the integrity of China.
7. Japan’s jealousy of Great Britain’s old-established economic situation there, and her efforts to defeat it.
8. Last but not least, the colour bar, which baffles agreement between Japan and our Over-Seas Brethren, and finds implacable opposition in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada.

556 Balfour Memo, June 22, 1917, quoted in Nish, 217.
557 Nish, 218.
558 Saxon, 78.
559 Greene to Langley, August 30, 1917, quoted in Nish, 219-221.
Moreover, Greene gauged, “the very points of divergence which separate us irreconcilably from Japan might in some interests even serve to draw us closer to America.” Greene opposed an abrupt abrogation of the alliance, but argued that common Anglo-American interests “suggest the intensive cultivation of our friendship with America” for “we might well try to bring in America on our side to redress the balance in the Far East.”

Although the battle against Germany was not yet won, British leaders were openly strategizing how to flip to the United States. Japan’s vital assistance to Great Britain during World War I had ironically shattered the alliance. Tokyo had eliminated the German presence in the Far East, escorted Imperial troops across the globe to the European theater, stationed an anti-submarine flotilla in the Mediterranean, and even helped suppress a revolt by Indian soldiers stationed in Singapore in February 1915. By doing so, it freed up scarce British forces to combat the graver German threat closer to home. Yet, the crucial assistance unpleasantly delineated the allies’ incompatible interests, particularly over China. While London endeavored to maintain a functioning and sovereign central Chinese government and deter foreign encroachment, Japan sought to keep China weak and gradually expel other foreign powers from the area. Without any strong institutional mechanisms or ideational ties to bind the two powers together, incompatible interests had slowly convinced the British government that its future would be better secured through an alignment with the United States.

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560 Greene to Langley, August 30, 1917, quoted in Nish, 219-221.
561 Saxon, 72-74. At one point, British officials seriously discussed, but ultimately did not pursue, using Japanese troops across the Middle East, from protecting Egypt to conquering Palestine and Iraq. John Fisher, “‘Backing the wrong horse’: Japan in British Middle Eastern Policy 1914-18,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 21, no. 2 (June 1998).
Post-War Settlement: An Alliance in Name Only

Victory over Germany dramatically reshaped Britain’s view of both the Far East and its international position. First, the liquidation of Germany’s presence in Asia had removed the last direct threat to Britain’s Far Eastern position. Second, Russia’s internal revolution and devastation had forced it to withdraw from the international scene. Third, Japan had ascended as the dominant power in the Western Pacific and Northeast Asia. Finally, the war marked the emergence of the United States as a global power, one on which Britain was supremely reliant and could not afford to compete with.

Japan’s ascendance and Britain’s languor only exacerbated the British government’s predicament. On the one hand, lacking both the purpose and institutions to maintain its existence, the alliance seemed set to lapse naturally at the end of its ten-year term in 1921. On the other hand, absent American support, the complete abandonment of the alliance would eliminate even the feeble restraints Britain believed it was imposing on Japanese actions. Prime Minister Lloyd George, who won a resounding post-war electoral victory that returned a stable and cohesive cabinet, recognized the growing danger of Japan, but demurred on confronting it until an alternative alignment could be enacted.

The Paris Peace Conference accentuated Britain’s increasingly stressful balancing act. Under withering pressure, Japan accepted League of Nation mandates for its new Pacific possessions and committed to transferring the sovereignty of the Shantung Peninsula back to China, but, in practice, Japan maintained effective control over both. Although he remained upset by Japanese obstructionism, Lloyd George explained to his
counterparts that Great Britain had to abide by the deal it struck during the war.⁵⁶²

Japan’s whole policy, new Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Earl Curzon fumed to the Japanese Ambassador in a July meeting:

was wrapt in a mist of doubt and suspicion which was creating very general alarm. If Japan was actuated by the friendly sentiments which she professed; if she meant to adhere to her earlier pledges to give up Tsingtau and Shantung; if she was prepared to withdraw the whole of her troops, civil administrators, and police; if, in fact, she was prepared to make a ‘bona fide’ restitution of whatever she acquired from Germany to China, why should she not come out into the open and say so? Why allow the atmosphere to be further poisoned by long concealment and delay?⁵⁶³

The end of the war had done little to rekindle the alliance.

Britain’s awkward support for Japan’s stance not only failed to improve its moribund alliance, but also partially contributed to Washington walking away from any new diplomatic arrangement. China was miffed by the victors’ willingness to auction off its territory to Japan and refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles. The U.S. Senate, similarly peeved at Britain’s assistance in helping Japan achieve war spoils in China, did the same.⁵⁶⁴ Ironically, President Wilson had hoped that the creation of the very League of Nations the Senate had rejected would obviate and thus abrogate the Anglo-Japanese alliance.⁵⁶⁵

As the alliance’s 1921 sunset date approached, London had yet to chart a path forward. A tour of Britain’s Pacific Dominions in 1919-1920 led Lord Jellicoe of the Admiralty to conclude that Japan was Britain’s sole threat and recommended increasing the British fleet.⁵⁶⁶ A January 1921 Foreign Office committee argued that Britain needed

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⁵⁶⁴ Lowe and Dockrill, 298.
⁵⁶⁵ Nish, 289.
⁵⁶⁶ Nish, 285.
to reverse the roles of its two main partners: ally with America, pacify Japan.\textsuperscript{567}

Nonetheless, Curzon cautioned that, with Britain’s naval weakness, continuing the alliance would make it easier “to keep a watch upon her movements in China, to demand of her in her dealings with us a greater measure of freedom and frankness than it would otherwise be possible to expect, and to exercise a moderating influence on her policy generally. It is true that our relations with her in China may be difficult in the future, but they will probably be less so if she is bound to us by a loose alliance and much less so than if she were to become the ally of Germany.”\textsuperscript{568} Flipping alliances, the Foreign Secretary warned, could actually make Britain’s Far East position worse.

As British officials debated the merit of its alignment alternatives, London and Tokyo issued a joint declaration on July 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1920, stating that their alliance would never be inconsistent with the newly formed League of Nations. Were the alliance to be renewed after July 1921, it would have to conform to the League’s covenant.\textsuperscript{569} Although the legal consequences of such a declaration were later disputed, the move failed to entice the United States into serious alliance discussions. Sir Auckland Geddes, the British Ambassador to the United States, cautioned not to put too much stock into the unreliable Americans while Sir Charles Eliot, Minister to Japan in 1921, advised not to antagonize the Japanese, whom he believed were naturally friendly in Asia.\textsuperscript{570} Lloyd George recognized that Britain’s worst possible outcome was a Japanese-American war with Britain in the middle. Japan would take Hong Kong and Singapore, its crown jewel of bases, before its fleet could arrive and the United States would wreak havoc on

\textsuperscript{567} Lowe and Dockrill, 299.
\textsuperscript{568} Curzon letter, January 5, 1920, quoted in Nish, 296-297.
\textsuperscript{569} Tate and Foy, 535.
\textsuperscript{570} Klein, 470-471.
Canada. Britain’s Dominions, Australia and New Zealand, felt similarly squeezed: they counted on the U.S. fleet for protection, but they also sought to avoid antagonizing Japan.

The Cabinet recognized the strategic impasse. Britain’s inability to project sufficient power to the Far East necessitated the use of Japan as a counterweight to a possible Russian and German resurgence. However, British neutrality in any Japanese-American conflict was unrealistic. Comparable to Italy’s predicament before World War I, Britain stood to lose whatever the outcome of the conflict. It thus turned to preventing a Japanese-American confrontation at all costs.

Transforming its bilateral alliance into a multilateral entente that foreswore such an outcome became Britain’s main way forward. Throughout 1920, the Foreign Office fleshed out the concept. “If our friendship with the United States,” read one memo Curzon had approved, “and our alliance with Japan should enable us to influence for the good the relations between these two countries and to cooperate with both for the rehabilitation of China and the peaceful development of the Far East, we shall have attained the goal toward which we must strive.” In China, Britain’s interests dovetailed with America’s and conflicted with Japan’s. However, “an isolated Japan might be driven to seek an alliance with a Russo-German combination to counter-balance an Anglo-Saxon cooperation.” When it came time to deciding on the alliance’s future:

the dominating factor for us will have to be the necessity of not antagonizing the United States. [That being so], some sort of Tripartite understanding in the Far East, to which France might also adhere, would indeed be an ideal situation. Until our ideal can be realised, however, we must content ourselves with the next best arrangement—alliance with Japan; intimate friendship and cooperation with the United States of America and France.

571 Klein, 471.
572 Klein, 473.
574 Curzon memo, March 19, 1920, quoted in Nish, 298-299.
Nearly two years before the Four-Power Treaty was signed, the British Foreign Office had identified it as its ideal arrangement.

The immediate debate about whether to renew the alliance pitted Victor Wellesley, Assistant Secretary superintending the Far Eastern Department who opposed renewal, against Sir Charles Eliot, Ambassador to Tokyo, who supported it. Japan’s penetration of China, Wellesley wrote in June 1920, has been “certainly more ruthless, more brutal and more insidious than that employed by Germany all the world over before the war.” The Anglo-Japanese alliance had become “an unnatural and artificial compact based neither on identity of interest nor on sympathy with common aims and ideals. Its perpetuation will stamp it as a ‘Mariage de convenance’ dictated on the side of Japan by fear of political isolation and on ours by the conviction that it affords us only the means of exercising a restraining and moderating influence on Japanese ambitions.”

When Eliot responded by again warning that an unfriendly Japan would endanger Britain’s Far Eastern position even more, Wellesley countered that Japan was “acutely conscious of her political isolation” and “the one thing she fears above all is closer co-operation between us and the United States. She realises[sic] that she cannot stand up against an Anglo-American combination in the Pacific.”

Japan, Eliot persevered, “will be very strong, and if we do not make her our Ally she will be decidedly hostile. I anticipate grave difficulties in India and our other Asiatic possession in near future, and we cannot count on American sympathy there. I do not think that we can afford to risk the enmity of Japan.”

575 Memorandum by Wellesley, June 1, 1920, quoted in Louis, 39-40.
576 Memorandum by Wellesley, September 1, 1920, quoted in Louis, 41-42.
577 Eliot to Curzon, December 12, 1920, quoted in Louis, 42.
Deadlocked, the Foreign Office formed a special committee to review the question of alliance renewal. After a four-month inquiry, the committee concluded in January 1921 that Japan was an obstacle, not an asset, to British goals in the Far East. Japan’s “aims have revealed an increasing variance from the principles for which British policy has always stood, and upon which the Alliance is founded.” The alliance “has never acted as an effective brake on Japanese activities; but we admit the force of the criticism to the extent of suggesting an alternative in the form of an Entente between Great Britain, Japan and the United States of America.” Britain needed to secure American cooperation. The committee reached the “unanimous conclusion that [the alliance] should be dropped, and that in its stead should, if possible, be substituted a Tripartite Entente between the United States, Japan and Great Britain, consisting in a declaration of general principles which can be subscribed by all parties without the risk of embarrassing commitments.” If America proved unwilling or incapable, Britain should conclude a weaker agreement with Japan without excluding future American participation.

Once an ardent cheerleader of the alliance, even Churchill now argued for a decisive flip towards America. At a Committee of Imperial Defence debate in December 1920, he stressed the need to allay American fears and prevent a naval arms race with the United States at all costs. He suggested avoiding any renewal of the alliance with Japan until the new Harding Administration took office in March. In contrast, Lloyd George argued that an alliance renewal could actually prompt a more accommodative American position since they would feel pressured by the Anglo-Japanese combined naval strength.

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Churchill denounced the concept of basing British naval policy on cooperating with
Japan to counter the United States, but the Prime Minister indicated he preferred that to
being vulnerable to American power.\footnote{Michael G. Fry, \textit{Illusions of Security: North Atlantic Diplomacy 1918-22} (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 75.} Balfour and Churchill were now in agreement, but Lloyd George and Curzon remained disinclined.

\textit{The Cabinet Meeting}

Careening towards the alliance’s termination date, the Cabinet met on the last day
of May, 1921 to resolve the debate and chart a coherent policy.\footnote{Legal obfuscation brought the treaty’s renewal to the fore. The treaty was supposed to expire on July 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1921, which is why Lloyd George convened the Imperial Conference in late June with the treaty renewal at the top of its agenda. However, a legal misunderstanding over its expiration terms sparked a scramble. The two allies had submitted a declaration to the League of Nations on July 8\textsuperscript{th} stating their interpretation that the alliance would never be at odds with the League’s covenant, which the Foreign Office legal adviser interpreted as tantamount to a denunciation of the alliance, which was never intended. Lloyd George sought to reverse or reinterpret the legal opinion so that the alliance would continue automatically even without any official renewal. On July 4\textsuperscript{th}, Curzon told a relieved Baron Hayashi, the Japanese Minister in London, that the alliance continued automatically. Although the misunderstanding was cleared up, it had turned both the late May Cabinet meeting and the Imperial Conference into far more dramatic gatherings. J. Bartlet Brebner, “The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Washington Conference,” \textit{Political Science Quarterly} 50, no. 1 (March 1935): 48; Louis, 57 and 73; Klein, 481.} Lloyd George and Curzon argued strongly for a renewal of the alliance, which had been a net positive for
Britain. It was a major asset during the war, absolved Britain from maintaining
significant naval and military forces in the Far East, checked Japanese ambitions, and
helped eliminate the Russian and German positions. Were these powers to resurge in a
few years, “an Alliance with Japan would be the natural guarantee.”\footnote{Cabinet Minutes, May 30, 1921, quoted in Louis, 45.} Unlike America, they added, Japan had always faithfully executed its commitments.

Churchill, tacitly supported by Balfour, countered that British security rested on
Anglo-American cooperation, to which all must be subordinated. Britain’s inability to
keep pace with the American naval building program meant it needed to avoid
antagonizing the United States and catalyzing an arms race. Renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, Churchill argued, would prompt the United States to build against both of them. “It would be a ghastly state of affairs if we were to drift into direct naval rivalry with the United States,” Churchill concluded. The debate turned, not on the worthiness of Japan, but on the assessment of America. Curzon viewed Britain’s former colony as isolationist and untrustworthy whereas Churchill saw it as hegemonic and needed. Churchill was a realist; he was an ardent advocate of an alliance with America in 1921 for the same reason he strongly supported allying with Japan in 1914.

Curzon was not an obstructionist and sought a compromise. He understood American concerns and supported seeking some arrangement with the United States, but remained pessimistic about its prospects. Instead, he proposed approaching President Harding about convening a conference on Pacific affairs, while assuring all that Britain intended to retain its Japanese alliance, albeit renewed for only five years and amended to comply with the League of Nations. In doing so, he was de facto advocating for a weaker Anglo-Japanese alliance. The Cabinet backed Curzon’s approach and agreed to prescribe it at the upcoming Imperial Conference. Although Britain’s intention was to maintain a diluted alliance with Japan, Curzon’s shift had set the stage for the Washington Conference.

The Imperial Conference

Convened on June 20th, 1921, the Imperial Conference marked London’s attempt to weave a unified policy. On June 28th, Curzon presented Britain’s case for the renewal

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583 Cabinet Minutes, May 30, 1921, quoted in Louis, 47.
585 Klein, 475-476.
of the alliance to her Dominions. The alliance, he explained, had never been aimed at the
United States, which the 1911 revision had made clear, although he understood that
Washington did not see it the same way. Canceling the alliance would be dangerous, but
Britain could explore a multilateral security arrangement in the Pacific, either through the
League of Nations or with the United States.\textsuperscript{586} Balfour rose to back Curzon. Britain was
militarily unprepared to be without a strong ally: “Had not Japan on our side we should
be second or third Power in the Pacific after a considerable number of years…Therefore,
in our view, so long as our relatively unprepared condition lasts, it is, from a strategic
point of view, of very great importance that the Japanese Alliance should be maintained.”
If Britain cast out Japan, she “may turn a faithful friend into a very formidable enemy,
and to turn a faithful friend into a formidable enemy at a moment when you find
yourselves relatively unprepared to meet any attack from the former friend and present
enemy is the worst policy you could possibly pursue from a strictly military point of
view.”\textsuperscript{587}

The issue divided the Dominions. To avoid alienating the United States, Canada
opposed renewal.\textsuperscript{588} In contrast, Australia energetically supported London’s case,
believing that Japan had been a far more reliable ally than the United States could ever
be. Angering Japan would not only make it lose an ally, but it would gain a vengeful and
powerful enemy.\textsuperscript{589} Australia and New Zealand both accepted Curzon’s proposal to seek
an alliance modification that would be acceptable to the United States.\textsuperscript{590}

\textsuperscript{586} Louis, 60-61.
\textsuperscript{587} Balfour Remarks to Imperial Conference, June 29, 1921, quoted in Louis, 61-62.
\textsuperscript{588} Brebner, 53.
\textsuperscript{589} Brebner, 54.
\textsuperscript{590} Tate and Foy, 536-541.
In parallel, British Ambassador Sir Auckland Geddes met with Secretary of State Hughes on June 23rd to exchange views regarding the fate of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. Although the two countries shared similar goals in the Far East, Hughes told Geddes, Americans felt strongly that:

if Great Britain and Japan had any arrangement by which Great Britain was to support the special interests of Japan, the latter might be likely, at the instance of the militaristic party, to be led to take positions which would call forth protests from this Government, and that in making such representations this Government might find itself virtually alone; that the making of such representations might be called for by American opinion and yet might be met with considerable opposition in Japan, leading to a state of irritation among the people in both countries; that such a condition of affairs would be fraught with mischief.\textsuperscript{591}

Struck by the threat, Geddes inquired whether Washington would be interested in joining a multilateral cooperative arrangement that included Japan. Cooperation would be welcome, Hughes responded, but it was doubtful that the American people would approve of any signed agreement. In order to drive the message home, Hughes further warned that Congress was considering a resolution that would recognize Ireland and:

that undoubtedly in the debate any relation between Great Britain and Japan could be seized upon by the enemies of Great Britain as indicating an attitude of disregard of what were believed to be the interests of this country, and would be made the most of, which action on the part of Great Britain indicating a desire to support the policy in the Far East to which this Government was committed, would give great aid and comfort to those who were opposing such a resolution.\textsuperscript{592}

The United States, Hughes added, would view the renewal of the alliance “in any form” with “disquietude.”\textsuperscript{593}

Anglo-American relations, Geddes cabled to Curzon, would be damaged by the alliance’s renewal, but the Harding Administration was willing to entertain a tripartite

\textsuperscript{591} Memorandum of a Conversation between the Secretary of State and the British Ambassador (Geddes), June 23, 1921, \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921, Volume II}, 314-316.
\textsuperscript{592} Memorandum of a Conversation between the Secretary of State and the British Ambassador (Geddes), June 23, 1921, \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921, Volume II}, 314-316.
\textsuperscript{593} Geddes to Curzon, June 23, 1921, quoted in Klein, 469.
entente as long as it jived with U.S. policies. Even as Curzon made the case for renewal to the Dominions, he also outlined a goal of arranging a four-way conference (the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, and China) on Pacific affairs, which garnered American approval during a meeting Curzon had on June 29th with the American Ambassador. Lloyd George echoed Curzon’s presentation on June 30th and summarized the new principles of Britain’s position: “(i) Great Britain could not quarrel with the United States of America; (ii) It was essential not to insult Japan by doing anything which would be tantamount to casting her aside after the loyal way in which she had observed the Treaty in the past; (iii) China must be carried with us and be a party to any conversation.” Since aligning solely with either Japan or the United States had major drawbacks, Britain instead sought to drastically modify its Japanese alliance to include the United States and thus mollify both powers.

Lloyd George also believed that abrogating the alliance would dreadfully damage Britain’s international reputation. Were Britain to be seen as a fair-weather friend, it might even make her a less attractive partner to America itself. “Is it to be suggested,” Lloyd George implored before the House of Commons:

that we should now turn round and say to them, “You stood by us in trouble, but we do not need you any longer, so goodbye”? Would anyone behave like that in business? The British Empire must behave like a gentleman, and when you come to deal with a country that has stood by you in trouble—stood well by you—are you to bring the alliance to an end when the trouble is over? I say that would not be becoming of the British Empire in dealing with a faithful Ally. And let me say this: I do not believe there is any country in the world, whether it likes the Japanese Alliance or does not like it, that would think any better of the British Empire if we broke off the alliance—not one. They might appear to be glad at the moment that we had done it, but in their hearts they would despise us for doing it.

Klein, 477-478.
Cabinet, June 30 1921 in Lowe and Dockrill, 654.
Lloyd George Remarks to the House of Commons on the Conference of Prime Ministers, August 18, 1921, quoted in Tate and Foy, 546.
On July 2nd, 1921, the Imperial Council supported Curzon’s recommendation to renew, yet modify the alliance with Japan as part of a broader Pacific security arrangement that included the United States. Sensing Britain’s shifting position, President Harding preempted London and issued invitations to an international conference in Washington in November to address numerous outstanding post-war issues. Britain regaled at the initiative, noting that it could lead to a wider basis of cooperation amongst the Pacific powers. The invitation induced the Imperial Council to agree that seeking a tripartite arrangement would be best.

The Washington Conference: Flip Consolidated

A postscript to the Paris Peace Conference, the Washington Conference tackled a series of large global order issues that had been neglected by the powers, accentuated by the American and Chinese failures to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. Whereas most focused on limiting global arsenals to prevent a repeat of the Great War, Washington was fixated on ending the Anglo-Japanese alliance, which it believed was inextricably linked to any putative naval tonnage reductions. Without a rival alliance in the Pacific, the United States could be more forthcoming with deep curbs to its naval building program, especially if it could finally align Great Britain with its own policies in the Far East. It grasped that the only way to flip Britain was through a trilateral agreement that included Japan. London’s fear of Japanese vengeance coupled with Washington’s unwillingness to forge a bilateral defense treaty made letting the Japanese down easy essential to the

600 Louis, 77.
mission. In a late September meeting with Ambassador Geddes, Hughes said “that the time had come when the constant sentiments and cordial expressions which were made at dinners and on various occasions with respect to the friendly cooperation of the two Governments should be translated into something definite.”

Until 1921, Anglo-American cooperation in the Far East had been sluggish and rare. The conference sought to make it smooth and frequent.

The United States used the conference to directly link its willingness to limit its naval tonnage to Britain’s repudiation of its Far Eastern ally. In preparation for the conference, Hughes had asked the Navy to submit recommendations for acceptable levels of naval arms reductions. The General Board replied that the levels hinged on ending the Anglo-Japanese alliance first. If the alliance remained in force, the United States would have to build a navy equal to Great Britain’s and twice that of Japan’s. Even as it sought to maintain some semblance of its Japanese alliance, the British delegation was willing to accommodate American concerns. As Churchill had warned the Cabinet, Britain had to avoid being bankrupted by a naval arms race at all costs. Lloyd George also harbored hope that cooperation could lead to Harding cancelling or reducing British war debts. Taken together, the Washington Conference was tailor-made for the United States to exploit Britain’s weakened state and force the flip.

However weak Britain was, Curzon still believed that abruptly terminating Britain’s alliance with Japan “would risk turning a faithful servant into a powerful enemy.”

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601 Memorandum by the Secretary of State of a Conversation with the British Ambassador (Geddes), September 20, 1921, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921, Volume I, 73.
602 Thomas H. Buckley, The United States and the Washington Conference, 1921-1922 (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 50. If one looks at the final ratios of the Five-Power Treaty, it would have meant going from a 5:8 ratio to a 11:8 ratio, a huge swing.
who might eventually destroy the Eastern Empire.”

Curzon had been disappointed by America’s post-war withdrawal from European affairs, but remained an admirer. “My own belief,” he had told colleagues, “is that in the troubles and turmoils of the east, if we can look to the west and re-establish excellent relations with America, we shall see a dawning of the light in the sky which is so overcast in almost every other quarter of the globe.” He was prepared to subsume the Anglo-Japanese alliance into a trilateral security mechanism, but he remained ready, like Lloyd George, to fall back on the stability of its two-decade alliance with Japan. “I regard the loss of these advantages,” Curzon said about the alliance, “with no small apprehension and am not at all sure that they will be compensated for by a temporary conquest of the beaux yeux of America.”

Whatever plenaries and publicity the conference would have, London, Tokyo, and Washington all recognized that the delicate alliance discussions were best held in private. The initial British draft of a new security arrangement suggested three clauses: i) respect for territorial possessions and promoting peace, ii) preservation of common interests in China and the Open Door, and iii) mutual communication on any issues or concerns.

Balfour, who led Britain’s delegation because neither Lloyd George nor Curzon could attend due to continuing Irish troubles, added language that would permit signatories to bind themselves to each other defensively as long as the third party was informed—a naked attempt to maintain the core of the Anglo-Japanese alliance.

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604 Louis, 81.
605 Curzon remarks, June 22, 1921, quoted in Louis, 82.
606 Louis, 84.
607 Memorandum on tripartite agreement, October 17, 1921, quoted in Buckley, 129.
608 Nish, 357.
609 Fry, Illusions of Security, 159-160.
610 Fry, Illusions of Security, 163.
Balfour presented a personally written memo to Hughes on the evening of November 11th, 1921. If the Anglo-Japanese alliance was to be discontinued, Balfour pleaded, it needed to be substituted with something amenable to the Japanese. “I am disposed to think that our Far Eastern Arrangements shall be embodied in two treaties arrangements rather than in one,” the memo read. “The first of these would deal with the preservation of peace and the maintenance of the territorial status quo: it would be tripartite and would replace the existing Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The second would deal with China.”

Balfour proceeded to outline the three main points of the potential Tripartite Arrangement:

I. That each of the High Contracting Parties shall respect such rights themselves and shall consult fully and frankly with each other as to the best means of protecting them whenever in the opinion of any of them they are imperilled by the action of another Power.

II. If in the future the territorial rights (referred to in Article I) of any of the High Contracting Parties are threatened by any other Power or combination of Powers, any two of the High Contracting Parties shall be at liberty to protect themselves by entering into a military alliance arrangement provided (a) this alliance arrangement is purely defensive in character and (b) that it is communicated to the other High Contracting Party.

III. This Treaty arrangement shall supersede any Treaty arrangement of earlier date dealing with the defence of territorial rights in the regions to which this Treaty refers.

Making clear the term “treaty” was unacceptable and that the U.S. would never defend, let alone recognize, Japanese imperialism, Hughes changed Balfour’s reference from a “treaty” to an “arrangement” and agreed that it would replace not only the Anglo-Japanese alliance, but also the Root-Takahira and Lansing-Ishii agreements. He also was concerned England and Japan could revive their alliance, and so suggested adding

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611 The word “treaties” was literally struck and replaced with “arrangements” at Hughes’s request.

612 Memorandum by Mr. Balfour, of the British Delegation. Handed to the Secretary of State by Mr. Balfour, November 11, 1921. The memorandum bears corrections in Mr. Balfour’s handwriting. Words which he crossed out are indicated in canceled type; words which he inserted are printed in italics. In a marginal note he says: “The word ‘arrangement’ as used in this informal and tentative document is deliberately vague.” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1922, Volume I, 3.

613 Memorandum, in Outline Form, by the Secretary of State of a Conversation with Mr. Balfour, of the British Delegation, November 11, 1921, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1922, Volume I, 1-2.
France to water down the notion that the new agreement was a military alliance.\textsuperscript{614} By substituting a harmless entente for the Anglo-Japanese alliance, Britain could exit her alliance gracefully.

Following his meeting with Hughes, Balfour cabled home to Lloyd George the depths of American opposition to the alliance, noting that it would make arms limitation hard to achieve. Rehashing some of the previous June’s Cabinet debate, Balfour noted that the need for the alliance was not as sharp as it used to be. He proposed a five principle plan that would form the bulk of a new arrangement:

(a) To enable the Americans to be parties to a tripartite arrangement without committing themselves to military operations: (b) To bring the existing Anglo-Japanese Alliance to an end without hurting the feelings of our Ally: (c) To leave it open to use to renew a defensive alliance with Japan if she should again be threatened by Germany or Russia: (d) To frame a Treaty which will reassure our Australasian Dominions: (e) To make it impossible for American critics to suggest that our Treaty with Japan would require us to stand aside in the case of a quarrel between them and Japan, whatever the cause of that quarrel might be.\textsuperscript{615}

Although he had emerged optimistic from his meeting with Hughes, Balfour did not pass the same draft to the Japanese delegations until November 23\textsuperscript{rd}.\textsuperscript{616} When a bed-ridden Shidehara saw it, he immediately concluded the United States would never accept language so close to a military alliance. He prepared a counter-draft, replacing obligations and commitments with consultations, and sent it back to Balfour, who upon seeing it, agreed to withdraw his own draft. With Balfour’s approval, Shidehara’s draft was shown to Hughes on November 26\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{617} To Hughes’s surprise, the Japanese version not only explicitly ended the alliance, but also replaced it with something far less definitive and with minimal hard commitments:

\textsuperscript{614} Vinson, 42-43.
\textsuperscript{615} Balfour to Lloyd George, November 11, 1921 in Lowe and Dockrill, 656-657.
\textsuperscript{616} Nish, 372.
\textsuperscript{617} Nish, 373.
I. If, in the future, the territorial rights or vital interests of any of the High Contracting Parties in the regions of the Pacific Ocean and of the Far East should be threatened either by the aggressive action of any third Power or Powers, or by a turn of events which may occur in those regions, the High Contracting Parties shall communicate with one another fully and frankly, in order to arrive at an understanding as to the most efficient measures to be taken, jointly or separately, to meet the exigencies of the particular situation.

II. If, in matters affecting regions aforesaid, there should develop between any two of the High Contracting Parties controversies which are likely to affect the relations of harmonious accord now happily subsisting between them, it shall be open to such Contracting Parties, in mutual agreement with each other, to invite the other Contracting Party to a joint conference, to which the whole subject matter will be referred for consideration and adjustment.

III. The present Agreement shall supersede the Agreement of Alliance hitherto in force between Japan and Great Britain. 

Heartened by the Japanese draft, Hughes issued his own that added France, set a ten-year expiration date, and included language about a dispute resolution mechanism. When he presented the new draft to his counterparts on December 8th, it was agreed to in principle. Twenty years to the day before Pearl Harbor, the United States had flipped Britain away from Japan.

When the agreement was signed on December 13th, the impossible had become true. The first “treaty” to emerge from the Washington Conference made no mention of navies or tonnage. The Four-Power Treaty marked the flip of Great Britain in the Far East from Japan to the United States. Britain had consented to replacing a firm defensive alliance with merely a consultative pact without transforming Japan into an enemy.

Balfour spoke elegantly about Britain’s flip:

When two nations have been united in that fiery ordeal [two great wars], they cannot at the end of it take off their hats one to the other and politely part as two strangers part who travel together for

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618 Draft by Ambassador Shidehara, of the Japanese Delegation, of an Arrangement between Japan, the United States of America, and the British Empire. Handed to the Secretary of State by Mr. Saburi, November 26, 1921, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1922, Volume I, 4.

619 Draft by the Secretary of State of an Agreement between the United States of America, the British Empire, France, and Japan, Undated, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1922, Volume I, 7.

620 Memorandum by the Secretary to the British Empire Delegation of a Conversation at the Home of the Secretary of State, December 8, 1921, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1922, Volume I, 13. It took the parties several additional days to agree to a common definition of island possessions.

621 Draft by the Secretary of State of an Agreement between the United States of America, the British Empire, France, and Japan, December 8, 1921, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1922, Volume I, 22-23.
a few hours in a railway train. Something more, something closer, unites them than the mere words of the treaty; and, as it were, gratuitously and without a cause to tear up the written contract, although it serves no longer any valid or effective purpose, may lead to misunderstandings in one nation just as much as the maintenance of that treaty has led to misunderstandings in another...The only way out of this impasse...was that we should annul, merge, destroy, as it were, this ancient and outworn and unnecessary agreement, and replace it with something new, something effective, which should embrace all the Powers concerned in the vast area of the Pacific.  

As a Japanese diplomat was reported to have remarked to a British counterpart at the conference, “At any rate you gave the Alliance a splendid funeral!”

The flip’s denouement was a little chaotic. First, the U.S. Senate barely ratified the treaty; the 67 to 27 vote was merely five more than the required two-thirds majority. Second, the Anglo-Japanese alliance technically remained in effect for another twenty months until August 17th, 1923, which was the date that ratifications of all Washington treaties were exchanged. Finally, Britain never received the debt relief from the United States it thought the new realignment would unleash. Prior to the Washington Conference, Ambassador Geddes had assured Curzon that the Harding Administration would become more financially flexible once a more amenable alliance agreement was struck. Lloyd George’s private secretary even recalled being told that British war debt forgiveness was directly tied to Britain’s abandonment of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. British optimism provided fateful; Washington was no more forthcoming. Lloyd George’s misreading of the American mood about the war debts ultimately felled his government in October 1922.

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622 Balfour speech, December 10, 1921, quoted in Nish, 376.
623 Tate and Foy, 554.
625 Dayer, 581-582.
626 Dayer, 582.
Conclusion

Britain’s flip from a Pacific rival to a Pacific ally shaped the future of great power competition in Asia. Although it neither caused nor prevented the continued Japanese advance and eventual attack on both British and American possessions in Asia two decades later, Great Britain’s alignment shift bound the two countries together in the Far East and paved the way for joint planning to counter Japan’s aggressive ambitions. As the diplomatic mechanism that ultimately unbolted London from Tokyo, the Four Power Treaty adeptly managed Britain’s delicate position as it sought to exit a counterproductive alignment and enter a more natural one.

Traditional alliance formation theories labor to explain Britain’s flip. The United States did not offer Britain any specific inducements. Washington’s alignment offer was not a direct substitute for Britain’s existing alliance, contained neither indulgences to nor endorsements of British policies, and did not commit the United States to doing anything it wasn’t previously willing to do. The Harding Administration’s decision to link American naval arms reductions to Britain’s choice of allies certainly exploited British weakness, but the seeming inevitability of American ascendancy would have limited Britain’s options regardless. Britain certainly did not flip because of Kupchan’s “concessions” or Crawford’s “accommodations.”

Moreover, neither common interests nor a common identity can best explain Britain’s strategic realignment in Asia. From very early on, British leaders acknowledged that their interests lay closer to America’s than Japan’s, yet they continued to find ways to justify maintaining their current alignment with Tokyo. Both the United States and the United Kingdom were concerned about Japan’s appetite for expansion on the Asian
mainland and both believed in the essentialness of Chinese territorial integrity and the maintenance of the Open Door in order to provide each with commercial opportunity. While a cultural and linguistic commonality certainly kept the two powers close, such civilizational coherence had hardly prevented warfare between the two powers in the past. Furthermore, the initial divisions and vociferous debate amongst the Dominions—all sprouts of the British Empire—over the future of Britain’s alignments only underscores that a common culture was not enough to dictate a common alliance. Save for Britain’s alliance with Japan, no major issue divided the two English-speaking powers in Asia.

The Anglo-Japanese alliance experienced three phases, becoming less cohesive with each subsequent phase. The alliance’s initial 1902-1905 design was neither very cohesive nor very strong. The two countries shared an overriding interest in countering Russian encroachment in northeast Asia, but the alliance terms could only be triggered if one of them were attacked by two other parties. The alliance had neither robust obligations nor credible commitments, lacked formal and developed cooperative institutions such as formal councils or regular military exercises, and bound together two countries with distinctive ideological outlooks and political identities. After Japan’s destruction of the Russian fleet in 1905, the alliance’s motivating animus disappeared and the two allies cast about to find other rationale’s for extending the relationship. During the 1905-1911 phase, London and Tokyo lowered the threshold for action, from an attack by two powers to an attack by one, and increased the scope of the alliance to cover the defense of India as well, but did not introduce any other terms or institutions to make the alliance more cohesive.
Consequently, World War I exposed and exacerbated the alliance’s lack of cohesion, which ultimately paved an opening for America. Although Japan, for the first and only time during the alliance, had greatly assisted Britain during the war, the assistance merely served to underscore how misaligned and divergent the alliance truly was. Japan was using the cover of the alliance to advance its own interests, particularly in China, which were in direct contradiction to British desires. As British leaders admitted, British wartime cooperation with the Japanese should more accurately be described as British acquiescence to Japanese actions that it was helpless to prevent anyways in the hope that it might retain some post-war diplomatic leverage. When the war ended without any common interests remaining, the alliance’s lack of cohesive terms, institutions, and ideational bonds meant that it likely would soon senesce as well.

In parallel, the British government emerged from the war strong, united, and cohesive, smoothing over any possible opposition to an alignment flip. The regime’s decision-making was highly concentrated in the hands of Lloyd George, Curzon, Balfour, and Grey, among whom there were no rivalries. The Liberals were in the midst of an uninterrupted 17 years—from December 1905 until October 1922—at the helm of the British government, the longest such party rule in close to a century and the fourth longest all-time. In ruling via a coalition with the Labour and the Conservative parties for the last seven, Lloyd George had managed to coopt potential rivals. The landslide December 1918 coalition electoral victory had neutered all opposition to the government’s intended policies. Once the four principal actors had coalesced around a similar outlook, the strong cohesion of the British regime enabled it to entertain alignment offers on their merits.
Despite the proper alignment of these two factors, Britain’s flip stalled as the United States was never truly interested in a formal alliance. Relations had warmed since the turn of the century, but successive American governments demurred when discussing any serious military alliance after World War I. Although the two powers eventually became close allies—a very delayed flip—it was not until the American attitude on international commitments had evolved, beginning with the Lend-Lease Act and the ABC (American-British-Canadian) Staff Talks in 1941. Britain’s suspended flip could be a justification for expanding the scope of further study to a larger spectrum of flipping outcomes.

Neither common interests, nor shared identity, nor inducements alone best explain why Britain realigned with the United States in the Pacific. Instead, Britain’s brittle alliance with Japan and its cohesive government permitted it to successfully flip alignments. Although neither of these factors shifted overnight, the Great War’s aftermath had finally unmasked the former and sealed the latter. With these two variables aligned, Britain advanced in its historic rapprochement with the United States that had begun two decades earlier.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

This project sought to shed light on a basic phenomenon in international geopolitical competition: why do states sometimes betray their allies and “flip” to the opposing side? Alliances are a common feature in inter-state relations, yet alliance defections are rare despite their substantial benefits. My research demonstrates that states flip when two specific variables are aligned: the state’s political regime is strongly cohesive and its existing alliance is weakly cohesive. The inference is clear: strong regime cohesion enables the state to flip alliances without domestic repercussions while weak alliance cohesion erases any institutional shackles that would maintain the alliance beyond the interests it served. Free from both internal and external constraints, the state is then able to flip its geopolitical position through realignment with its former adversary.

Both factors must be present in order for a state to flip. Regardless of its motivation, the regime must be confident that embarking on such a radical realignment is not internally costly to its rule. A strongly cohesive regime controls the state’s security apparatus, possesses complete decision-making autonomy, and is unconcerned about political rivals. The regime’s key leaders are likely to hold congruous views on critical issues and are unlikely to challenge one another for power. A cohesive regime is stable, not volatile, and is more likely to be long rather than short-lived. Whereas a strong and cohesive regime has greater freedom of maneuver to conduct its foreign policy, a weak and divided regime is primarily concerned with domestic consolidation of power and is therefore less likely and less able to entertain such a dramatic international undertaking.

Similarly, weak alliance cohesion alliance facilitates a state’s desire and ability to exit it. A weakly cohesive alliance has few and fragile obligations, limited and
underdeveloped institutions, and little ideational convergence. Lacking robust terms or entwined and embedded cooperative mechanisms, the divergent interests of the two states face few obstacles to the dissolution of the alliance. If a state is interested in flipping sides, it can more easily do so if there are no alliance institutional hindrances. A flip occurs when both internal political and external institutional constraints have been weakened or removed.

The four flips examined in-depth validate this initial hypothesis and serve as a template for further studies. In all four cases, the divider state’s effort to flip the target state dated back decades, but only succeeded when the two aforementioned factors were in harmony. By conducting process-tracing case studies, I was able to demonstrate when and how those variables shifted over time and therefore directly link the flip to their evolution. At the time, leaders concluded that it was their tactful and shrewd diplomacy that realized the flip, but, with the benefits of time and distance, my research contends that more fundamental dynamics were at play.

The pace and sequence of the evolution of the factors varies by case, but the flip occurs shortly after the factors are aligned. In the case of Egypt, American efforts dated back to the Eisenhower Administration, but only succeeded after the 1967 war had shattered the initially strong cohesion of the Soviet-Egyptian alliance and Sadat had consolidated power through the elimination of his main rival. Likewise, the Sino-Soviet alliance was never cohesive, but it was not until Mao had outmaneuvered a series of rivals that had emerged from the political turmoil of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution that he became receptive to American engagement efforts. The Franco-British flip of Italy from its three-decade alliance only prevailed when Italy’s
membership in the Triple Alliance had become devalued and Prime Minister Salandra managed to coopt or cast out any political rivals. Finally, Great Britain’s postwar half-flip away from Japan followed Lloyd George’s stunning post-war election romp and the concentration of power among a small and united Cabinet. Had the United States been interested in consolidating the relationship, Britain would have gladly done so. In each case, the respective alliances became less cohesive and the regime became more cohesive over time.

Despite the parallel paths taken by these flips, several additional morsels are worth highlighting. First, while none of these examined flips occurred as a consequence of war, Italy’s about-face, which occurred during World War I, demonstrates that flipping is not solely a peacetime endeavor. In fact, the defection of a state from one wartime coalition to another can be extraordinarily consequential, as the comportment of the Soviet Union in World War II illustrated. Alliance flips are indeed just as germane to great power conflict as they are to great power competition.

Second, regime type is not a critical factor in regime cohesion, although it is possible that democracies are harder to flip. The four case studies represented four different regime types, yet each grappled with questions of cohesion and power consolidation. Democracies, military regimes, and revolutionary states alike are susceptible to divisive politics, diffusive power concentrations, and loyalty cliques. Whether in authoritarian regimes (China, Egypt), a quasi-democratic plutarchy (Italy), or in a consolidated democracy (Great Britain), leaders considered their political predicaments in similar terms. Nevertheless, authoritarian regimes can more easily
concentrate power and have more tools at their disposal to weaken rivals. This may explain the paucity of flips of democratic polities.

*Theoretical Implications for the Study of Alliances*

The results of this exploration have a number of implications for the study of alliance formation, management, and dissolution. First, the institutional structure and character of the existing alliance may be more important than the interests that bound the states together. A state may desire to exit and/or enter an alliance due to converging or diverging interests, but those interests alone are insufficient in enabling such a realignment to occur. In each of these case studies, deep dissatisfaction with the existing alignments was longstanding and yet it took years, sometimes decades, for the state’s alignment to change. Robust terms, close military cooperation or dependence, and the existence of interlaced cooperative mechanisms can prevent a state from acting out its interests. If a state is in an alliance without such institutional stickiness, then it can more effortlessly free itself if it so chooses.

Consequently, divider states are incentivized to seek ways to weaken the cohesion of the targeted alliance. The disruption, impairment, and dilution of the targeted alliance institutions can disable the clamps that often keep states bound together despite diverging interests. Since doing so is difficult, states may therefore look to target alliances that have the least amount of cohesion. For example, if China or Russia is looking to pick off an American ally, they are more likely to concentrate their efforts on those U.S. alliances that are less robust and institutionalized. Conversely, if the United States is concerned
about the possibility of Chinese or Russian engineered flips, then it ought to attempt to
deeper the alliance infrastructure of its partners.

Such a finding also downgrades the importance of what the new alliance offer
actually entails. Whereas Crawford and others argue that inducements, endorsements, and
appeasements are critical determinants in a successful wedge strategy, these case studies
establish that alliance cohesion matters more than flip bait. In fact, in several of these
cases, the new alliance offers were either equivalent or even inferior to the existing
alliance terms. A state’s offer of costly concessions may inspire a state to abandon its
previous ally, but it is insufficient to cause a state to flip sides.

Second, alignment choice cannot be divorced from the political power and
motility of regimes. A state is exceedingly unlikely to select into an alignment that is
opposed by its own political leadership. Therefore, not only must the regime be interested
in a new alignment, but it must also be capable of doing so. The capability of a leader to
execute a radical transformation in that country’s alignment is determined by his
domestic political operating environment. To better understand the modalities of alliance
formation and reformation, greater attention and significance should be given to the
strength, structure, and composition of the targeted regime. A leader is more likely to
consummate a flip if it does not weaken his reign.

This conclusion, therefore, leads to counterintuitive advice for divider states.
First, divider states should concentrate their efforts on states with preexisting strong and
cohesive rather than weak and divided regimes. A flip is more likely to be successful by
engaging with, rather than working around, the very cohesive regime that stands is
currently in a rival alliance. Second, attempts to bolster a discordant or crumbling regime
through an alignment offer are likely to backfire. Not only will the flip attempt flop, but the regime is also more likely to suffer domestic consequences for even engaging. Finally, in order to increase the likelihood of a successful flip, divider regimes would be advised to devise strategies to improve the cohesiveness of a weak regime before attempting to woo it. In some circumstances, this may entail putting one’s thumb on the scales of a regime rivalry, but, nonetheless, a divider’s states energies would be better deployed to creating a regime that is conducive to a flip.

**Fear is Not Enough: A Challenge to the Explanatory Power of Power and Threat**

This project’s perhaps most provocative theoretical contribution is that the primary determinant of a successful flip is not a state’s perception of external threats. Flipping dynamics do not automatically subscribe to the standard balancing behavior that forms the core of the alliance literature. Flips can occur not only because a state has become threatened by its current ally, but also because it is either unsatisfied with its current alignment or simply because the new alignment offer is superior. In three of the four cases examined in this study, fear was not the prime motivating factor in the search for a new alignment. States were dissatisfied with the lack of gains produced by their alliance or frustrated at the policies of their partners, but were not directly or primarily threatened by them. Moreover, even if a state does crave a new partner out of fear of its current one, fear alone is not enough. As these cases demonstrate, the state is able to flip only if it can do so without fear of domestic repercussion (regime cohesion) and without the institutional stickiness (alliance cohesion) of its current relationship standing in the way.
This finding does not eliminate the role a threatening power can play in motivating realignments, but even in the circumstances where it is a galvanizing and necessary factor, it still is not a sufficient condition to realize a flip. Of the four cases examined in this study, China’s flip from the Soviet Union to the United States is the only one where it could be argued that the primary cause for the new alignment was fear of its current alliance partner. Yet, even in this case, there was a huge delay—over a decade—between Chinese fears over the rising Soviet threat and Beijing’s interest in allying with Washington. Moreover, during that interlude, U.S.-China relations were at their nadir during the Vietnam War. If threat alone changed alliance calculi, then warmer Sino-American relations and even a partnership would have occurred much earlier. Even when a flip is primarily sparked by the need to balance against a menace, threat alone is not sufficient to actually conclude such a difficult geopolitical maneuver. In the case of China’s post-1969 behavior, it was at best a correlation of forces—literally Soviet ones on the border and the demise of Mao’s last rival Lin Biao—that made the flip succeed.

Accordingly, this foray on flipping leads to several observations about the formation of alliances and how it relates to power. First, states seek to join alliances not only due to threats, but also due to opportunities. A state does not need to feel endangered in order to enter, or exit, a security relationship with another state. Scholars and practitioners may identify shifts in power or threat and expect concurrent alliance fluctuations, but they are likely to be disappointed when those shifts do not materialize automatically. Such a finding does not fit well with the alliance behavior expected by structural realism.
Second, in addition to a greater appreciation for what animates a state to seek security partners, there should also be additional consideration for what actually enables states to form alliances. The intervening stage of alliance development, literally how states convert their motives into movements, is too often overlooked. As these cases make clear, the interest in a new alignment is rarely sudden, yet other permissive factors must be present in order for the alignment to materialize. China may have sought an alternative alliance partner because it felt threatened by the Soviet Union, but it was unable to consummate such a move unless its existing alliance institutions had been weakened and until it had consolidated domestic control. The enablement of alliances matters just as much, if not more, than the origins of alliances.

Finally, the distribution of power in the international system has little impact on alliance flips. First, there appears to be no correlation between number and frequency of flips and polarity. This study has included cases under both distributions of power with little observable impact. Except for perhaps the British case, none of the other flips occurred after a change in the balance of power. The flips of Egypt and China developed during the dead of the Cold War, whereas both the Italy and British cases ensued during an era of sustained multipolarity. As described in the first chapter, not only do theoretical arguments about the impact polarity point in multiple directions, but the historical evidence also bolsters the lack of a clear relationship.

Moreover, it remains unclear at what level does the impact of structural polarity matter. In many of these cases, local or regional issues or trends had a far greater impact than global power distributions on alliance behavior. For example, Albania’s flip between
the Soviet Union and China during the Cold War occurred under bipolarity, but it was the
Sino-Soviet, not the Soviet-American, competition that was most relevant.

Finally, changes in the distribution of power may be evident in hindsight, but are
exceedingly difficult to discern in real time. It takes an exceptionally adept analyst to
pinpoint the moment a new balance of power has been established as opposed to simply
when the balance is in flux. For example, if China today manages to flip the Philippines
away from the United States, has unipolarity ended or is it simply a sign that the world is
shifting away from it? To summarize, there does not appear to be any relationship
between the nature of the international system and the ability of states to realign their
geopolitical positions.

Confessions, Limitations, and Next Steps

Given the paucity of academic work on flips, this project was merely an initial
incursion into a maneuver that is commonly pursued, but rarely successful in
international relations. Ergo, humility is critical. As far as I am aware, the table I
compiled in Chapter One is the first working database of flips. Inevitably, there will and
should be others who will scrutinize, expand, enhance, and even subtract from the catalog
I amassed. As I explained at the outset of this project, I purposefully chose an expansive
definition of both flips and alliances in order to broadly examine the dynamics of the
phenomenon with the full understanding and expectation that others will take deeper and
narrower plunges. Although I only conducted four in-depth case studies, I hope they will
serve as a worthwhile foundation for those who take up the baton.
With such humility in mind, I offer a few confessions. First, when examining large-scale geopolitical dynamics, complexity is sacrificed on the altar of simplicity, particularly when it comes to the roles of individuals. This study began with four plausible independent variables with sixteen possible outcomes, but it quickly became evident that relatively little explanatory power would be lost if two were eliminated. However, in any examination of geo-strategic diplomacy, the role and nature of individual leaders are paramount. While I argue that these individuals, such as Mao or Salandra, created conditions that enabled the flip, it remains an unfalsifiable assertion that these flips would never have happened without them. Even as I build a generalizable theory, it is important to note the color that is lost.

Second, flipping is less relevant to the unipolar moment of the past quarter-century. Flipping is fundamentally a competition between larger states over the allegiances of smaller states in the international or regional order. Since such a competition is absent in the presence of a true hegemon, alignment tug-of-wars become infrequent if not missing altogether. Unsurprisingly, none of my cases transpired under a unipolar distribution of power. Instead, over the past twenty-five years, American efforts have focused on so-called “rogue states” such as Iran, North Korea, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, Muammar Gaddafi’s Libya, and terrorism. While I did not find polarity to be a critical factor in my study, it seems reasonable to conclude that flipping is not only more relevant under multi-polarity, but also more frequent.

Third, flip sustainability was not examined in this study, but should be in forthcoming studies. If the purpose of flipping is to engineer grand geo-political shifts, then those transformations must be durable in order to be impactful. While there does not
appear to be any correlation between the duration of the targeted alliance and the cohesion variables—many dated back several decades before being broken up—I did not probe whether there is a relation between the variables and the durability of the new alliance. Most of the flips endured long enough to have significant geo-strategic repercussions. Italy may have returned to the German fold less than two decades after its flip, but the flip had an outsized impact on the World War I. Similarly, the Sino-American partnership may only have lasted seventeen years, but it fundamentally changed the Cold War. Meanwhile, the Anglo-American and American-Egyptian alliances continue to this day.

Fleeting flips, however, remain an analytical concern. Can a flip truly have occurred if it is reversed relatively quickly? Interestingly, two of the three flips in my database that did not conform to my hypotheses were fleeting; the Soviet Union’s flip of Nazi Germany from Japan and Italy from 1939-1941 and Iraq’s flip of Jordan from the United States in 1990-1991 were reversed in short order. The short half-lives of these flip may reinforce my argument. In both cases, the bonds of the preexisting alliance were too strong and ultimately pulled apart the fledgling flip. Nevertheless, further diligent consideration is needed to determine the relationship between the critical factors I have outlined and the staying power of a flip.

Fourth, the adoption of a spectrum of flipping as the dependent variable would further elucidate how even less dramatic alignment shifts impact great power competition. In his examination of wedge strategies, Crawford delineates a range of possible alignment outcomes: realignment, dealignment, prealignment, and
disalignment. While a full flip, or realignment, is likely to have the most momentous impact on the geopolitical landscape, this does not mean that outcomes short of a 180-degree transformation or of varying shades are wholly divorced from the same dynamics. The neutralization of a rival’s ally is part and parcel of the flipping phenomenon.

A flipping spectrum could also render more prominent previously moot factors. For example, less cohesive regimes may be able to dealign from their current ally, but not fully realign with their former enemy. In Asia today, current American allies such as the Philippines and Thailand may be neutralized by China, but the lack of internal coherence of their regimes make them unable to fully flip. Similarly, the impact of polarity, previously muffled, could be greater if one considered a spectrum of outcomes. Because multipolarity affords states different options for alignment, it may also be more likely than bipolarity to result in variation in alignment shifts. The establishment of a typology of flipping outcomes would have greater practical application.

**A New Era of Flipping?**

The United States remains the world’s sole global power, albeit no longer as the unrivaled hegemon. The rise—or return—of regional powers, notably Russia and China, and their recent assertions of military power has reignited long-dormant competitions for power, prestige, and influence in a variety of theaters. Russia has reemerged as a potential adversary in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Meanwhile, China has challenged American military dominance across the Asian littoral and American economic, financial, and diplomatic leadership throughout Asia and other parts of the world. If anything, fluidity in the distribution of power in the international

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627 Crawford, 164.
system incentivizes flipping because challenger states seek to accelerate their rise through the acquisition of allies, especially those who used to be bonded to their rivals. Looking out into the next couple decades, these competitions for mastery are likely to dominate U.S. national security doctrines.

As part of this contest, the competition over the allegiances of smaller powers will intensify. Unable and unwilling to directly challenge Washington militarily, both Russia and China are likely to try their hand at improving their geopolitical positions without provoking a military clash. Moscow and Beijing will likely see the high-reward, low-risk endeavor of flipping as a wise strategy to accelerate the changing balance of power in their neighborhoods. A decade ago, some international security scholars characterized great power pushback as “soft balancing”, a methodologically and evidentially fraught term that sought to describe early-stage and indirect backlashes to American hegemony.628 Today, flipping may be the opening strategy in multi-stage competition.

Given the extant state of the current international system, the United States will likely be on the defensive side of this game as Russia and China hunt for U.S. allies to flip. By one count, the United States is treaty-bound to defend 69 countries, making up seventy-five percent of global economic output and twenty-five percent of the global population.629 Longstanding American alliances dominate East Asia, Europe, and much of the Middle East and are likely to be the terrain over which this game is played. Although the United States can still mount an offensive—the nascent and fragile flip of Burma away from China is not only such an example, but also seems to correspond to

this study’s theory—it is far more likely to be engaged in the Sisyphean enterprise of keeping as many of its allies onside as it can.

Signs of the new era of flipping are already evident. In a discussion that would have seemed ridiculous a decade ago, the Australian political elite openly debates the wisdom of being tethered to the United States when it only serves to irritate their larger and ever-closer economic partner, China. 630 Whereas Australian troops have fought side-by-side with their American counterparts in every war over the last century, the U.S. now worries whether Australia will do so in the future. 631 Just this past year, the newly-elected Filipino president has cozied up towards Beijing, explicitly at Washington’s expense. 632 While it is too early to determine how substantive this move is, it is another example about how power transitions can spark frenzied flipping. China has made similar moves with regards to South Korea and Thailand. 633

Russia has likewise undertaken efforts to peel off U.S. allies in Europe and the Middle East. It has cultivated closer ties with Turkey, a member of NATO, despite the Turkish downing of a Russian fighter jet in late 2015 and the murder of the Russian

631 Westbrook, “Australia Must Choose Between United States and China.”
Ambassador to Turkey by a terrorist in late 2016. Inside the European Union, Moscow has identified Hungary, another NATO ally, as ripe for partnership. Warmer ties with a slew of other Middle Eastern countries, notably Israel and Egypt, are also concerning for Washington. Moscow has yet to claim any successes, but its attempts are increasingly visible.

At the dawn of a new era of alliance competition, the lessons from this study could serve as an analytical template for both evaluating the likelihood of a flip attempt’s success and for, in the American case, fending off these gambits. If my conclusions are correct, Russian and Chinese attempts are more likely to be successful in cases where the regime is cohesive and the targeted alliance is not. For instance, even though Turkey’s regime has become far more cohesive over the last few years than at almost any point in its history, NATO remains a strongly cohesive alliance with robust institutions and manifold peer-to-peer structures of collaboration. American troops are even based on Turkish soil. Given the paucity of successful flips in modern history, it is no wonder that few current U.S. allies are presently ripe for flipping. Nevertheless, Washington could

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take actions to shore up its alliances in order to make it even more difficult for
competitors to wedge themselves between them.

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to identify, define, and analyze a
critical element in geopolitical competition that is likely to become more ubiquitous in
the future. By pinpointing the critical factors that enable states to betray their allies and
flip to a rival state, I hope to have contributed to a broader discourse over how and why
do alliances evolve and what role do they play in the strategic contest among great
powers.
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