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## Why Do States Pursue an Independent, Dependent, Reliant, or Integrational Nuclear Weapons Policy vis-à-vis Available Alliances?

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### Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, European defense policy has become a complicated matter. Whether Western European dependence or reliance on NATO security guarantees, independent efforts or integration into alliance structures, no common development can be distinguished. While some European nations have used NATO guarantees to supplement their defenses, others have used it to supplant them and have become dependent on NATO. This diversity is found in the policy of the major powers of the continent—the United Kingdom, France, and Germany—it is quite noticeable with regards to their choices of nuclear weapons strategy. How can we explain the choices made by these three states vis-à-vis the alliance structures? How do their behaviors differ? Which factors influence their decision-making process? Answering these questions will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of states' nuclear weapons policy and the reasons behind closer commitments, or divergence.

Despite the voluminous literature on nuclear weapons and alliances, studies are often concentrated on particular issues. As a result of Cold War bipolarity, attention has been primarily directed to the US and the Soviet Union. This literature has evaluated NATO nuclear policy through the lens of US objectives<sup>①</sup> rather than European prerogatives. However, a shift towards regional powers' nuclear postures and their differing logic compared to superpower nuclear competition has been noticeable.

Recent studies emphasize the nuances of nuclear weapons states' behavior based on multiple levels of analysis and non-military utilization,<sup>②</sup> rather than structurally determined consistency.<sup>③</sup> Moreover, some focus on the strategic side of developing and deploying nuclear arsenals,<sup>④</sup> while others embed their work within the context of broader political and economic considerations additionally<sup>⑤</sup> or approach the matter

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① David S. Yost, "The US Debate on NATO Nuclear Deterrence," *International Affairs* 87, no.6 (2011); Gerald Garvey, *Strategy and the Defense Dilemma* (Toronto: LexingtonBooks, 1984).

② Mark S. Bell, *Nuclear Reactions: How Nuclear-Armed States Behave* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2021); Vipin Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).

③ Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

④ Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century*; Paul Buteux, *Strategy, Doctrine, and the Politics of Alliance: Theatre Nuclear Force Modernisation in NATO* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983).

⑤ David J. Gill, *Britain and the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy, 1964-1970* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

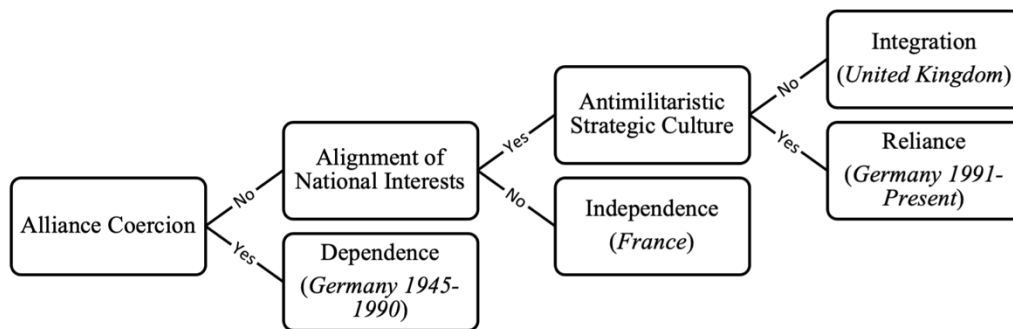
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based on psychological analysis.<sup>①</sup> The overall proliferation literature, on the other hand, has produced mostly tentative results, and although “some variables perform better than others, most fail to offer strong explanations for existing patterns of proliferation” that would enable us to predict future developments.<sup>②</sup>

A gap persists between the interplay of nuclear weapons and alliances. Often, alliances are already incorporated as variables into these models, for example, in the form of existing senior allies<sup>③</sup> or a third-party patron.<sup>④</sup> This availability of alliance protection can result in coercion,<sup>⑤</sup> reciprocal strengthening, as well as voluntary withdrawal. The current research does not adequately reflect this diversity.<sup>⑥</sup> The following essay therefore attempts to fill this gap by identifying decisive factors influencing nuclear weapons policy vis-à-vis alliances.

This study will provide and develop its argument in three steps. First, it will outline a model explaining the choices amid dependent, independent, reliant, and integrational nuclear strategies. Second, it will apply the model to the three cases of France, Germany, and the UK. Not only are all of them regional powers with similar means to proliferate, but they also face a comparable geopolitical environment and have developed similar strategic identities, i.e., their abstract sense of belonging to a Western community, in contrast to more ambiguous cases of alignment, i.e., Turkey. Utilizing a comparative case study approach, using most similar cases thus allows for the isolation of the deciding factors of alliance relationships. Third, a discussion of alternative explanations and implications will conclude the essay.

### Theoretical Model



① Beatrice Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities? Strategies and Beliefs in Britain, France and the FRG* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998).

② Mark S. Bell, “Examining Explanations for Nuclear Proliferation: Research Note,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no.3 (2016): 526; Scott D. Sagan, “The Causes of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation,” *The Annual Review of Political Science* 14 (2011).

③ Bell, *Nuclear Reactions*.

④ Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*.

⑤ Gene Gerzhoy, “Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint: How the United States Thwarted West Germany's Nuclear Ambitions,” *International Security* 39, no.4 (2015).

⑥ Qualitative works like Kristan Stoddart, *The Sword and the Shield: Britain, America, NATO, and Nuclear Weapons, 1970-1976* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) are tied to specific cases and hard to generalize, while existing theoretical accounts like Bell, *Nuclear Reactions* remain too broad, labelling the UK and France both independent and missing crucial nuances.

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States are first and foremost restricted by potential alliance coercion. Such restrictions are only possible under two conditions. First, the state is militarily dependent upon its allies. Second, these allies make their security assurances conditional upon the nuclear weapons policy choices of the state.<sup>①</sup> Hence, alliance coercion acts as an inhibitor to internal balancing or expansionist ambitions. A state will not be able to afford upsetting its allies under such conditions, as it needs to rally every support it can get. Coerced states are therefore exhibiting dependent behavior, resulting to adherence to allies' requirements in spite of national motives or preferences for change. Second, states evaluate the trade-offs in gains and costs of staying within the alliance. Crucially, this does not mean that states are able to significantly influence and control the alliance strategy if it enjoys free-riding or buck-passing. However, if the costs of the membership will become unbearable and the alliance patrons cannot coerce member nations to adhere to its preferences, states will use nuclear weapons policies to facilitate their foreign policy objectives independently of the alliance. Such behavior can be described as conducting foreign policy despite of allies opposing or not supporting it.

Third, national mentalities will shape the state's conduct of alliance politics. Importantly, antimilitarism does not equate to pacifism but instead to rejection of unnecessary military expansion, because of national identities or international norms. Antimilitarism acts as a stopping mechanism, leaving states content with relying on alliance military forces, instead of seeking to enhance military prowess in reaching foreign policy objectives. In the absence of such restrictions, states will seek to integrate their forces with the alliance to strengthen it as an extension of itself and reach foreign policy objectives more easily.

### **Empirical Evidence**

#### Germany

NATO's nuclear sharing coordination is crucial to explain Germany's lack of an indigenous nuclear weapons capability, which separates it from France and the UK. During the Cold War, the Federal Republic of Germany remained dependent upon NATO in the face of the Soviet threat on its border. After this strategic concern disappeared and more possibilities opened up, the reunified Germany opted to voluntarily remain reliant on NATO. It is important to distinguish these two outcomes, due to the different motives underlying each strategy. Hence, the first section will examine the Cold War era, while the second will explain why German behavior has not changed significantly in the subsequent period continuing to this day.

#### Germany 1945–1990

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<sup>①</sup> Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 91–105.

Although Germany promised to not produce nuclear weapons during NATO entry negotiations in 1954, it continuously displayed nuclear ambitions. Therefore, the outcome cannot be dismissed as mere adherence to formal institutionalization. Moreover, even in such a case, leaving NATO and pursuing an independent policy would have been a possibility as demonstrated by France. What then, is the expectation according to the model?

During the Cold War, German alliance politics were the outcome of answering the threat posed by the Soviet Union on one hand, and the preferences by NATO—particularly by the US and UK—on the other. The strong and superior military presence of the Soviet Union was a major concern to German politicians, who acknowledged the need to take balancing efforts.<sup>①</sup> Moreover, their presence was backed up by threats and a belligerent foreign policy of the USSR. Reconciliation or redrawing alliances was unlikely to occur. Simultaneously, the UK and US were strongly opposed to any Western German nuclear ambitions. Hence, the prediction would be successful NATO alliance coercion towards the FRG, which should translate into a dependent nuclear weapons policy. Does this hold true?

Germany's ambitions to develop nuclear weapons were indeed halted continuously by the US. Adenauer in particular was rather adamant about German nuclear weapons,<sup>②</sup> or at least cooperation with France on the matter.<sup>③</sup> His successors Erhard, Kiesinger, and Brandt similarly expressed these ambitions.<sup>④</sup> Often times, these statements came as results of lacking German confidence in the credibility of NATO's security guarantees. For example, the 1956 Radford plan's proposal to partially replace conventional forces by means of a nuclear deterrence,<sup>⑤</sup> US détente policy vis-à-vis the Soviets<sup>⑥</sup> or unsatisfying nuclear sharing proposals<sup>⑦</sup> all decreased German trust in the alliance. In response, Germany pursued parallel plans with France to fulfil its nuclear ambitions, encouraged by French President Charles de Gaulle.<sup>⑧</sup>

However, the US eventually pressured the FRG to relinquish these efforts. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations sought to re-centralize control and reverse more liberal tendencies of the Eisenhower presidency. Kennedy supported German domestic pressure against Adenauer's rule to end Franco-German cooperation and exploited the FRG's dependency to get it to sign the Limited Test Ban Treaty. Later, Johnson coerced Germany into signing the Nonproliferation Treaty. These German concessions were traded for coordination on nuclear weapons strategy via German participation in the Multilateral Force and

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① Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 107.

② Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer: A German Politician and Statesman in a Period of War, Revolution, and Reconstruction* Vol. 2 (Providence: Berghahn, 1997), 239–40.

③ Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 111–14; Ronald J. Granieri, *The Ambivalent Alliance: Konrad Adenauer, the CDU/CSU, and the West, 1949-1966* (New York: Berghahn, 2004), 199; Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 596-598, 693, 718.

④ Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 119, 122.

⑤ Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 236.

⑥ Granieri, *The Ambivalent Alliance*, 179–80.

⑦ Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 118.

⑧ Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 111–14.

Nuclear Planning Group, as well as US promises to keep a certain number of troops in Europe. Such conditional security assurances consequently pushed the FRG into renouncing its own nuclear ambitions.<sup>①</sup>

### Germany 1991–Present

With the disappearance of the Soviet threat, alliance coercion was no longer a possibility.<sup>②</sup> Instead, Germany's policy became informed by its evaluation of alliance membership perks and national identity. Although Germany was not a nuclear power itself, it strongly identified itself with NATO and was simultaneously constrained by increasingly antimilitaristic norms domestically. In turn, the expectation for this second period would be a reliant strategy.

Due to alignment of national interests with continual NATO membership, German reunification, and the extinction of the Warsaw Pact along its borders did not translate into an independent nuclear weapons policy. Calls for a withdrawal from NATO although appeared occasionally, specifically on the left of the domestic political spectrum, government leaders and majority of the public supported the alliance.<sup>③</sup> This support came in opposition to continuous French efforts to establish a European pendant without US influence. This highlights the voluntary dimension by which this behavior was informed. Along positive perceptions of multilateralism,<sup>④</sup> Germany accepted US leadership and remained content with its degree of influence on alliance strategy under nuclear sharing coordination.<sup>⑤</sup>

Moreover, Germany independently developed a strong antimilitarist strategic culture. Even in facing the Warsaw Pact, Germany only conceded to military means as a way of deterrence and national defense. After the disintegration of the Communist Bloc and generational change towards advocates of the anti-nuclear movement, antimilitarist sentiments became even more pronounced.<sup>⑥</sup> Thus, Germany developed a policy of entrusting its allies with military matters and heavily restraining itself. It was simultaneously limiting its ability to gain influence within the alliance like the UK's expansion.

### France

France poses an example of independent nuclear weapons policy. First, France should have not been restricted by alliance coercion. Second, France was apparently not content with the state of the alliance and

① Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint."

② John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," *International Security* 15, no.1 (1990): 6. argues precisely that "Germany is likely to reject the continued maintenance of NATO as we know it."

③ Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities?*, 218–29.

④ John S. Duffield, "Political Culture and State Behavior: Why Germany Confounds Neorealism," *International Organization* 53, no.4 (1999).

⑤ Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities?*, 216–19; Moira Fagan and Jacob Poushter, "NATO Seen Favorably Across Member States" (Pew Research Center, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/02/09/nato-seen-favorably-across-member-states/> Statista, "Ist die NATO für die Sicherheit Deutschlands wichtig?" (2022), <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1317911/umfrage/relevanz-der-nato-fuer-deutschland/>.

⑥ Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities?*, 201–12.

Anglo–American hegemony. Therefore, as the model would predict, it displayed independence-seeking behavior, based on its nuclear weapons policy.<sup>①</sup>

France did not face the same coercive pressure by alliance partners like Germany. Regarding military dependence, a case could potentially be made for insufficient German buffering of Soviet conventional superiority, and questionable FRG rearmament. While Bell believes France to be sufficiently removed from Warsaw Pact troops,<sup>②</sup> Narang posits that the World War II experience of UK and US abandonment and lack of an English Channel triggered significant security fears among the French.<sup>③</sup> Nonetheless, US leaders apparently were not willing or able to assert sufficient pressure on the French and merely discouraged its nuclear ambitions by refusing cooperation and only offering negative guidance.<sup>④</sup>

Under the conditions of this two-tier relationship with the US and UK dominating the alliance, France did not believe its national interests aligned properly with NATO. France was a junior ally to the “Anglo-Saxons”<sup>⑤</sup> and possibly Germany too. The lack of NATO support for French interests at Dien Bien Phu 1954 and in the 1956 Suez Crisis further affirmed French negative suspicions.<sup>⑥</sup> The Mendès, Mollet, and de Gaulle administrations consequently stressed the need for a completely independent nuclear force, institutionalized by withdrawing from NATO’s command structure in 1966 and acquiring effective delivery capabilities by 1967.<sup>⑦</sup>

Interestingly, French discussions on compatibility with NATO display similarities with the UK’s nuclear weapons policy. Theorists debated the contribution French nuclear weapons posed for Europe’s defense early on.<sup>⑧</sup> Even de Gaulle was initially attracted to and a driving factor behind NATO and French disillusionment. This was primarily revolved around American hegemony within the alliance.<sup>⑨</sup> It thus continuously advocated for the separation of the “twin-pillars.” In the absence of European support for this idea, France often lost itself in uncertainty of where to limit French interests.<sup>⑩</sup> Thus, the 1994 White Paper drew a red line for potential employment in defense of allied countries,<sup>⑪</sup> which, although not specifically

① Wolf Mendl, *Deterrence and Persuasion: French Nuclear Armament in the Context of National Policy, 1945-1969* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), 19; Wilfrid L. Kohl, *French Nuclear Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 9; Pierre Gallois, “French Defense Planning: The Future in the Past,” *International Security* 1, no.2 (1976): 17.

② Bell, *Nuclear Reactions*, 153–56.

③ Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 154–56.

④ Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 155. Although France was very suspicious of American infringements on its sovereignty regarding assistance anyway (Gallois, “French Defense Planning,” 17.)

⑤ Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities?*, 116.

⑥ Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 155–56.

⑦ Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 158. However, Bell, *Nuclear Reactions*, 153–54 attributes this to year 1964, while Benoit Pelopidas and Sébastien Philippe, “Unfit for Purpose: Reassessing the Development and Deployment of French Nuclear Weapons (1956–1974),” *Cold War History* 21, no.3 (2021) assess this to be the case only in 1974.

⑧ Bruno Tertrais, “Destruction Assuree: The Origins and Development of French Nuclear Strategy, 1945-1981,” in *Getting MAD: Nuclear Mutual Assured Destruction, Its Origins and Practice*, ed. Henry D. Sokolski (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004), 73.

⑨ Frank Costigliola, “The Failed Design: Kennedy, De Gaulle, and the Struggle for Europe,” *Diplomatic History* 8, no.3 (1984): 235–37.

⑩ Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities?*, 138.

⑪ Bruno Tertrais, “The Last to Disarm? The Future of France's Nuclear Weapons,” *Nonproliferation Review* 14, no.2 (2007): 252.

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aimed at Europe, hinted at the vision of alliances bolstered by the integration of sovereign French nuclear forces.<sup>①</sup>

### United Kingdom

Finally, the United Kingdom is an example of integrational nuclear weapons policy. Its conventional military power, particularly its naval forces, and isolated geographical position negated the threat posed by the Soviet Union. Challenges for independence by its colonies similarly remained limited to the respective country, offsetting any military dependence on NATO. Second, the UK was contented with NATO as a means of influencing the US and continental European balance of power. Third, were nuclear weapons-related decisions not constricted by an antimilitarist strategic culture. Hence, one would expect the integration of its nuclear weapons policy with the alliance.<sup>②</sup>

Indeed, the British acquisition of nuclear weapons served to lessen dependence on US forces and to ensure its weight within NATO. The UK cooperated with the US on the development of nuclear weapons to avoid falling behind amidst concerns about US defense commitments to Europe like those in Germany.<sup>③</sup> However, unlike French instrumentalization of nuclear weapons to facilitate independence, the UK strove towards establishing closer ties with the US. This culminated in the 1962 Nassau Agreement on procuring Polaris, and later Trident systems. While necessitating the question of dependence on US supply, UK elites nonetheless remained convinced that its nuclear weapons policy primarily allowed for extensive influence on American nuclear targeting plans and NATO's nuclear strategy by granting it an independent use or eventual exit option from the alliance.<sup>④</sup>

Crucial at that point, the UK pursued a policy of integration with NATO, rather than relying on US means. The US aimed to make NATO reliant upon its nuclear umbrella, including NATO coordination plans and sales agreements. Indeed, some politicians favored British disarmament plans and leaving nuclear responsibilities to the US. However, the majority supported the continuation of a more proactive policy in the absence of antimilitarist constraints.<sup>⑤</sup> This meant comfortability with conventional and nuclear escalation against the Soviet Union and embracing NATO as “core value in British policy.”<sup>⑥</sup> The UK thus

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① For a discussion of France's post-Cold War nuclear doctrine see David S. Yost, “France's New Nuclear Doctrine,” *International Affairs* 82, no.4 (2006).

② See also Matthew Jones, *The Official History of the UK Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: From the V-Bomber Era to the Arrival of Polaris, 1945-1964* Vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2017a); Matthew Jones, *The Official History of the UK Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: The Labour Government and the Polaris Programme, 1964-1970* Vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2017b); Kristan Stoddart, *Losing an Empire and Finding a Role: Britain, the USA, NATO and Nuclear Weapons, 1964-70* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Stoddart, *The Sword and the Shield*.

③ Bell, *Nuclear Reactions*, 43–46.

④ *Ibid.*, 45-46, 55-73.

⑤ Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities?*, 39–41; See also John Baylis and Kristan Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience: The Role of Beliefs, Culture, and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⑥ Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities?*, 36.

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pursued a dual policy of committing and coordinating its nuclear forces with NATO while avoiding specialization and dependence. It was thus retaining national operational control with large parliamentary support for maintaining its own nuclear forces.

### Implications

The current state of the art undervalues the interplay of military alliances and states' strategic choices regarding nuclear weapons. I believe that improving our knowledge in this area has greater implications for understanding subsequent phenomena and can strengthen the performance of existing approaches. Particularly, this relates to nuclear posture optimization theory<sup>①</sup> and the theory of nuclear opportunism.<sup>②</sup> It provides an explanation when states seek independence or bolster existing alliances and consequent adaptations of their nuclear posturing. In turn, the model should be applicable to cases outside Europe.<sup>③</sup>

However, some potential objections to this approach may be debated. First, that nuclear weapons policies were results of domestic coalitional politics or changes in leadership. Yet, international stimuli were a much more powerful driver in the first place. Germany in particular demonstrates that domestic factors like antinuclear sentiments of Erhard or the emergence of the antinuclear movement in the 1980s did not overwrite coercive influences of NATO. Another example would be the changes of UK prime ministers not leading to significant nuclear policy alterations. Therefore, domestic factors are only secondary to alliance coercion. Only then can domestic interests and values be decisive.

Second, a counterargument may be that economic factors and resource constraints are a more powerful explanation. First, although a case can be made that such factors influenced the UK's nuclear posture change towards assured retaliation while France was able to sustain asymmetric escalation,<sup>④</sup> such adaptations are primarily efficiency improvements. The cases of the People's Republic of China as well as India demonstrate that assured retaliation is sufficient for sustaining an independent policy. Second, economic considerations cannot explain why the UK chose to only partially adapt its nuclear weapons posture rather than rely on US forces like Germany in the post-Cold War period. Third, while economic reasons can explain the substitution of conventional forces for nuclear ones, it requires additional analysis to explain when such moves are accepted by other alliance members.<sup>⑤</sup> Therefore, these factors offer little additional explanatory power, while negatively affecting the model's parsimony.

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① Bell, *Nuclear Reactions*.

② Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*.

③ For example, Japan bears particularly strong resemblance to the German development, while Israel's catalytic nuclear posture sought to bring in the US in case of a conflict, hinting at an integrational approach. North Korea offers an interesting case, since coercive influences and alignment of interests are not as clear cut in the Sino-Korean relationship. This offers an avenue for further research.

④ Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 169.

⑤ Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 117 Germany was repeatedly anxious about American conventional forces reductions or withdrawals.

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Third, one may object to the influential role played by norms for nuclear weapons policy choices. Particularly, the reconciliation of German antimilitarism and early nuclear weapons ambitions may be difficult here. However, although both pronuclear proponents like Adenauer, and antinuclear leaders like Erhard sought nuclear acquisition, both addressed the issue within the alliance context. Even the more proactive Adenauer only sought to pursue nuclear weapons through investing into the French nuclear weapons program, and because he, correctly, mistrusted the US MLF proposal.<sup>①</sup> Erhard also saw acquisition as only secondary option to a satisfying nuclear sharing agreement within NATO.<sup>②</sup> Thus, even such advocations remained limited on reliance to nuclear partners. This further explains the lack of German nuclear ambitions in the remaining Cold War period, because of sufficient NATO assurances and nuclear consultations.

Therefore, this essay provides a working, parsimonious model of the interplay between states' alliance politics and its nuclear weapons policy. Unless states are limited by alliance coercion, they utilize their nuclear weapons policy to enable an independent behavior or rather seek to strengthen a valuable alliance. However, a state may also decide to voluntarily rely on its partners if antimilitaristic norms inhibit military expansionist options. Hence, only after Germany switched from a dependent to a reliant policy after the Cold War did the UK integrate its forces with NATO and France became more independence oriented.

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① Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 111; Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 663–65.

② Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint," 119.

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