

# *Against Over-Reliance on Military Power: Can Game Theory Provide Rational and Realistic Security Strategies for Europe and East Asia?*<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

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After the onset of the second Cold War, there has been a notable shift in the general mood of diplomacy. Ideas that were developed by peace researchers over the past decades have swiftly become outdated, and even some of the potentially useful ones have been disregarded as naive. Conflicts are no longer perceived merely as strained relationships but rather as outcomes stemming from malevolent individuals, groups, and countries, such as dictators, tyrannies, atrocity criminals, and terrorist organizations. Consequently, conflict resolution is often viewed as requiring the elimination of these bad actors, often through military power. As a result, military might, rather than peacebuilding, has once again become the predominant means of ensuring safety.

This article aims to rescue some of the wisdom of peace research by investigating basic rational premises of conflict resolution and by testing them against the realities East Asian and European Western allies live in. The staggering finding of such an exercise is the realization that US military support, or military power in general, does not, after all, safeguard security from conflict and organised violence, despite the cynical times with atrocity criminals roaming around in world politics. Instead, the effort to rescue people from violence should not be focused on the deterrence of atrocity criminals and robust military enforcement of humanitarian norms, but on the prevention of bargaining failures and over-confidence in the conflicting parties' bargaining positions. Furthermore, it turns out that the same rational model that offers us this wisdom also shows why the interests of Western Europe, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan are not aligned with those of Americans, when it comes to intra-alliance bargaining.

The utilization of game theory aims to elucidate the inherent deficiencies

in dominant oversimplified representations of conflict dynamics, which often dichotomize interactions into simplistic binaries such as protagonists versus antagonists or perpetrators of atrocities versus upholders of humanitarian values. Additionally, the theory illustrates the repercussions stemming from such inadequately nuanced perspectives. While game theory effectively highlights the shortcomings of such paradigms, it falls short of presenting a comprehensive alternative framework that accounts for the myriad variables shaping the dynamics of the game, including preferences and relevant agency. Simplistic game models fail to capture the inherent unpredictability of geopolitical actors, shifts in framing (social game structures), misinterpretations, and incidental occurrences. Consequently, it is imperative to view instances utilizing game logic as illustrations that debunk the dominant simplistic and irrational conceptualizations. However, it is worth acknowledging that although inaccurate in details of game structures, this article does provide simplified, yet fundamentally correct, frameworks of conflict as alternatives to prevailing paradigms.

The argument of this paper consists of three elements. First, it argues against the narrative of hegemonic enforcement of order. Second, it argues against the reliance on power in the negotiation of norms and order. Finally, it suggests that allies of the hegemon should have independent dialogue with states they consider threatening. All these elements are derived from the game theoretical logic of bargaining. The modelling of conflicts as coercive bargaining will borrow from John Nash's extended bargaining model (Nash 1953; see also Zeuthen 1930; Saraydar 1965; and Harsanyi 1956), and the application of such a model into the realm of security by John Fearon (Fearon 1998; see also 1990; and 1995). These models, while simplified and failing to capture many elements of changing preference, changing perceptions of conflict and even changing agency in conflicts, demonstrate the illogic of reliance on military power in search of security and peace. However, in addition to arguing with simplified game theoretical models, this article offers qualitative and quantitative empirical evidence in support of each of the elements of the argument.

### Against Neoliberal Institutional Military Interventionism: Why is it not Rational for East Asia and Europe to Help US Enforce Peaceful Norms in Europe and in East Asia?

Expressions like “atrocious criminal,” “denying impunity,” “enforcement of norms,” and “rules-based international order” have become fashionable in world politics. For example, De Cuéllar claimed in 1992, soon after the end of the First Cold War, that “This is the opportunity to usher in a new era in which under the rule of law disputes will not be left to fester, aggression will enjoy no impunity, and oppression no license.” (Cuéllar 1992, 1204). President George H. W. Bush utilized this logic of enforcing norms and denying impunity in his justification of the First Gulf War, stating, “... Iraq's unprincipled, unprovoked aggression must not go unchallenged.” (Bush 1991, 1673). Similarly, Clinton used the logic of enforcing rules in his policy that transformed UN peacekeeping into a partisan warfighting and manhunt against the atrocious Somali warlord. For Clinton, this was an enforcement of order or a norm that he considered clear and universal

(Clinton 1994, 1624).

Furthermore, there is a clear indication of the logic of conflict in which the opponent needs to be enforced into a singular, universally/mutually recognized order. It is evident how the enforcement discussion has moved away from the context of the UN into a unilateral context. Recently, the EU, UK, and the US have started creating institutionalization for unilateral enforcement of norms against atrocities as they perceive them (see, for example, UK Government 2022). When applied to conflicts, they all refer to a model in which violence is a function of intentional violation of universally known norms. The question in conflicts is no longer a disagreement on terms of cooperation and peace, but rather, there is a violator of a universally and mutually agreed solution point. It involves opportunistic behaviour, in which there is only one cooperative option based on the university norm, while all other strategy options are deceptive, non-cooperative and opportunistic.

According to Howard, the US approach towards North Korea differed from the one assumed for Iraq, where the idea of enforcing cooperative behaviour was more pronounced (Howard 2004). It could be argued that until the war in Ukraine, the US attitude towards Russia and China was also better characterized as competition rather than enforcement. However, in North Korea, the US negotiator of the Framework Agreement of 1994 characterized the mood by claiming that the US administration already in the 1990s felt the need to enforce the norms of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons on North Korea, as State Department officials felt that the IAEA was not strong enough for such enforcement (Wit, Poneman, and Gallucci 2004, 8). Also, in the context of the creation of the New World Order after the Cold War, negotiations between Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and President George H. W. Bush revealed that the US did not want to share its leadership with Russia or the CSCE in the enforcement of global norms, and that Russia was to be an object rather than a subject of such enforcement (Sarotte 2014, chap. 4; Bush and Gorbachev 1990, 3–4). With regards to China, sanctions have enforced the global economic and humanitarian order as defined by the US, while forceful enforcement has been reserved for the defence of Taiwan. While there is an agreement committing the US to recognize only one China, the current government emphasizes that this commitment was made long ago, and that the order enforced by the current US government is one in which the independence of Taiwan is a matter for the Taiwanese people. The US does not encourage Taiwan to declare independence, yet, there is a clear military commitment to defend Taiwan in case of a Chinese attack, presumably even if this occurs after the Taiwanese have decided on independence (Biden 2022).

Neo-liberal institutionalist theorists have game-theorized this logic of conflict by using an iterated game theory model and introducing the concept of the “shadow of the future.” The original setting is based on the prisoner’s dilemma model (Rapoport 1965), in which all rational actors are tempted to deceive their opponents and choose strategies that maximize their individual utility, leading to outcomes worse for all compared to the case where all actors choose cooperative strategies. This happens because if the opponent acts cooperatively, thinking of the collective good, and we only think of our benefit, we get the highest benefit from our opponent’s cooperation while not having to compromise our selfish utility maximization. This leaves the opponent with a sucker’s payoff, the worst option, as they compromised their selfish utility maximization for the common good but still did not receive our cooperation. On the other hand, if we assume our

opponent chooses a selfish, non-cooperative strategy, we are better off by choosing a similar strategy to avoid the sucker's payoff, sacrificing nothing for the common good since we assume our opponent will not cooperate anyway. The paradox in this situation is that while both parties are individually rational to reject cooperation, we assume that both cooperating players would get a better outcome than if both did not cooperate. Individual rationality leads to social irrationality because both parties are tempted to lure the opponent into a cooperative strategy and then deceive them by choosing a selfish, non-cooperative strategy.

In a conflict situation, we could assume that conflicting parties reach a mutually accepted solution point, such as a 50-50 sharing of disputed territory, if both parties cooperate and do not secretly prepare for a military operation to annex the territory by surprise. The game-theoretical logic of the basic setting can be illustrated by the following matrix presentation:

**Matrix 1: Prisoner's Dilemma**

		Player 1	
		Cooperate	Non-cooperation
Player 2	Cooperate	R <u>R</u>	S      T
	Non-cooperation	T      S	P <u>P</u>

Here the preference order for both players is  $T > R > P > S$ , and  $T + P < R + R$ .

Axelrod and Keohane suggest that in the reality of international and intrastate interactions, encounters between states are not limited to a single game. Instead, states interact continuously, providing an opportunity for a super-strategy, a guideline to follow in a series of games rather than a single one. This super-strategy, according to Axelrod and Keohane, is reciprocity: if the opponent chooses non-cooperative strategies, such as aggression, we will reciprocate the same next time. This way, the opponent must consider whether it is more beneficial to cooperate this time and the next, or if it is better to maximize benefits now and forgo the benefits of our cooperation in the future. By considering the "shadow of the future," the opponent may be persuaded to cooperate continuously, knowing that our non-cooperation follows a failure to cooperate in each prisoner's dilemma game. This can remove the temptation to choose an uncooperative, selfish strategy at the super-game level, leading to unilateral cooperation through communication of this reciprocation super-strategy to each opponent. This approach can promote cooperation in an anarchic context where there is no superior regulating agency to compel cooperation from an authority position. Assuming a super-strategy of reciprocating non-cooperation with the peaceful liberal world order could help tackle the temptation of non-cooperation (Axelrod 1985; 1986; Keohane 1986).

However, what makes cooperation possible in the neoliberal institutionalist model is the continuous interaction among players in the liberal interdependent world. This implies that the choices made today not only determine the immediate outcome but also influence the subsequent decisions of the players. As a result, the future can cast a shadow back upon the present, thereby affecting the current strategic situation (Axelrod 1985, 12).

By using Matrix 1, we can observe that choosing a non-cooperative strategy during the initial encounter with an agent employing the strategy of reciprocity results in either T+P or R+R, depending on whether the agent cooperates or deceives first. Since, by definition of the prisoner's dilemma structure in Matrix 1, T+P is less than R+R, the strategy of reciprocity compels the opponent to cooperate if, and only if, the conflict game can be characterized as iterated prisoner's dilemma games.

In this manner, collective Western reciprocity-based enforcement of US-led rules-based international relations, cooperation, and non-violence serve as rewards for Russia's cooperation and non-violence regarding norms of non-interference in the treatment of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers by other countries, as well as cooperation with the norm respecting the rights of neighbouring countries to choose their military alliances and the hosting of US weaponry associated with it (Executive Orders 13660, 13661, 13685).

In East Asia, non-violence towards China is reciprocated with non-violence towards Taiwan, while economic cooperation entails a list of conditions ranging from human rights and trade practices to strategic technologies. Non-violence towards US allies and the US is likely a condition for US non-violence towards North Korea, whereas crippling sanctions are utilized as tools to enforce global humanitarian norms as perceived by the US, as well as norms of non-proliferation, including non-proliferation of strategic technology (US Department of State, 2022), particularly delivery vehicles capable of reaching the US with explosives (US Department of State, US Department of Commerce, and US Department of Treasury, 2020), as well as norms related to shipping practices (US Department of State, US Department of Treasury, and US Coast Guard, 2019). Increasingly, norms concerning influence and propaganda are included in the rules-based international order that conditional cooperation enforces towards US adversaries, including China, Russia, North Korea, and their supporters (US Department of State, 2024; 2022).

However, the crucial issue for the usefulness of the Neoliberal Institutional model is whether conflicts and disagreements are generally situations where we can consider our own solution points as the only reasonable ones, and thus, any deviations from such solution points are seen as non-cooperation. This perception is often conveyed to audiences by associating our peace with peace in general, linking our terms of peace with the cessation of violence, even though peace could also be agreed upon on our opponent's terms. The joint statement of NATO Foreign Ministers portrayed their military power and use of force, along with their terms of peace, as constituting genuine peace: "We stand together in unity and solidarity and reaffirm the enduring transatlantic bond between our nations. We will continue to strive for peace, security, and stability in the whole of the Euro-Atlantic area." (NATO Foreign Ministers, 2022, art. 4). Yet, obviously, peace could have also been established, and violence avoided, had Ukraine and NATO accepted Russian terms of peace, including Ukrainian neutrality and equal treatment of ethnic Russian Ukrainians. Naturally, Russia, too, tended to normalize its own terms of peace as the only form of "real peace" and disregarded peace on the terms suggested by NATO and Ukraine (Putin 2022).

This is very close to the logic that has applied to US-North Korea negotiations on nuclear weapons. US intention was to impose crippling sanctions to persuade North Korea to comply with the global non-proliferation regime as it interprets it, and yet, historical evidence casts serious doubts on the usefulness of this effort. On

**2**

For North Korean argument according to which, this violation is the reason for North Korean development of nuclear weapons, see (Pyongyang Times 2022a)

**3**

For North Korean critique of this violation and justification of its own violence by using this as an argumentative reference, see (Pyongyang Times 2022b).

**4**

See for example, the preamble of the text of the new nuclear doctrine of North Korea (Jeongmin 2022)

the one hand, North Korea had difficulties interpreting US hostility as enforcement of commonly accepted norms. The fact that there cannot be international laws that are different for the US, Russia, China, France, and the UK than for anyone else means that the non-proliferation norm can only be based on a joint agreement. An agreement, again, is always something parties enter voluntarily, and as defined in Article X of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, parties can also exit ('Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons' 1970, art. X). Furthermore, given that the US violates the treaty by not actively working on disarming its own nuclear weapons (preamble),<sup>2</sup> and by moving its own nuclear weapons outside its own borders and stationing them in other countries (article 1),<sup>3</sup> its punishment of North Korea for North Korea's violations are often treated as hostility rather than enforcement of a norm. Furthermore, what the US sees as reciprocity and enforcement, and what North Korea perceives as hostility, alters North Korea's perception of the US as an actor. The existence of this actor, viewed by North Korea as hostile and dangerous, provides North Korea with a rationale to pursue defensive and deterrent capabilities.<sup>4</sup> North Korea's super-strategy of reciprocity is clear in its nuclear doctrine that was defined by its former foreign minister, Ri Yong Ho, as follows: "The DPRK's possession of nukes and ICBM is a legitimate option for self-defence in the face of clear and real nuclear threat posed by the US against the DPRK." (Ri Yong Ho 2017, 1) Thus, considering our proposed solution as the only reasonable terms of peace may be unwise, as it precludes negotiation and could exacerbate tensions and conflicts. Negotiation, again, may have a better track record in efforts to avoid organized violence.

If we examine Europe and East Asia, we realize that the only extended period of North Korean cessation in its development of nuclear weapons occurred after the dialogue that resulted in the Agreed Framework of 1994. According to the US Minister for Defense, William Perry's assessment in 1999, five years after the agreement, "The Agreed Framework of 1994 succeeded in verifiably freezing North Korean plutonium production at Yongbyon—it stopped plutonium production at that facility so that North Korea currently has at most a small amount of fissile material it may have secreted away from operations prior to 1994" (Perry 1999, 3). Similarly, the last effort at stopping the full-scale North Korea's nuclear weapons production in 2018 and early 2019, was a product of negotiation that intended to secure the core interests, not only of North and South Korea, but the US, too. Tangible, even if only temporary progress was made, as a result of negotiations that considered several solution points, in the field of crisis stability and cooperation (Office of National Security 2018).

In Ukraine, statistics on fatalities from organized violence (using data from Davies, Pettersson and Öberg 2022) testify that negotiations and the conclusion of the Minsk Agreement and Minsk Agreement II reduced violence substantially. Thus, admitting that there are several possible alternative solutions, and negotiating on them may be a better alternative to insisting on one solution and enforcing it through sanctions and force.

If our opponent considers its own preferred solution point as a competitor to our solution point, or if the opponent considers its own solution point as the only reasonable cooperative solution, then we cannot model conflict as enforcement by means of reciprocity. Then reciprocation does not result in cooperation and peace. If our opponent considers its own solution point as the only cooperative one, then both us and the opponent consider each other as uncooperative. Thus, both reciprocate each other's failure to cooperate by not cooperating themselves in

5

Unilateral great power intervention here means military involvement with war fighting by a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as a third party of an intrastate conflict, without the initial endorsement or authorisation of the UN Security Council.

6

This is calculated from the UDCP conflict data (Pettersson and Eck 2018) by simply counting US involvement in war operations. It is important to realize that there may be several conflicts within one country, and thus, the number of conflict participations does not refer to the number of countries US forces are fighting. The UDCP data does not count air operations as war participation unless US troops are stationed in the conflict area. Due to the increase during the Obama presidency of US conflict participation in which the US stations no troops but only conducts air operations, one could conclude that the increase in US conflict participation has increased even more than this calculation suggests. This problem is corrected in the dataset of the University of Bath (Kivimäki 2019b). Using this data the conclusions on the failure of liberal institutionalist security policy becomes even more pronounced (Kivimäki 2019a, chap. 4).

peaceful interaction. This only escalates violence. Reciprocation with aggression does not deter the opponent; on the contrary, it is the very reason for the opponent's violence, as it constitutes the strategy that needs to be reciprocated according to the Neoliberal Institutional model.

There is, of course, the possibility that our opponent does indeed think that our solution is the only reasonable one, yet he may resist it out of opportunistic reasons. If this were the case, our enemy would not need to reciprocate our use of force with its own use of force, as our opponent did not see it as a reasonable solution point, but rather operative opportunistically. In such a situation, our forceful enforcement action could reduce the opponent's violence both during and after the operation, compared to the situation before the enforcement. If we look at data (Kivimäki 2023), we realize that this was the case only in one of the 16 unilateral great power interventions,<sup>5</sup> while in 14 cases fatalities increased during the operation, and in 10 cases, the operation left the country worse off than before.

Thus, for peace, an understanding of conflicts as prisoner's dilemma situations that need to be approached with a super-game strategy of reciprocation seems not just erroneous but also harmful. The war on terror and the war on tyranny have both demonstrated this problem. The United States has significantly increased its military involvement in conflicts after its public rhetoric began demonstrating the neoliberal institutionalist logic of reciprocation and punishment for "non-cooperation." In the 1990s, the average number of conflict operations the US was involved in was 0.2; it rose to 2.5 in the 2000s and further increased to 5.4 in the 2010s. Similarly, when considering all allied operations with US, UK, and French participation, the growth is almost equally significant, going from 0.6 to 2.7 to 5.5.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the neoliberal institutionalist framing of conflict does not appear very successful or practical, as it hinders the possibility of compromises and peaceful resolutions.

However, while the neoliberal institutionalist framing may not contribute to achieving peace, it might not always be intended to do so. The US does not seek to negotiate peace with terrorists (or dictators); instead, it aims to promote security by destroying such enemies. Ending conflict by eliminating the enemy does not amount to peace, but in theory, it may help create security. However, it does not stop justifying violence in the minds of people who are not yet members of existing formal organizations. Violence against the US is not limited to existing members of formal organizations; thus, targeting these groups may destroy a particular organization, but it does not necessarily reduce threats to US security, as violence can motivate reciprocity-oriented radical youth in the same way it did for members of these formal organizations. While the US may be able to eliminate all existing enemies, it cannot possibly eliminate all potential enemies.

Thus, we should not consider conflicts as interactions in a Prisoner's Dilemma formation. Instead, we should consider conflicts as encounters where there is inherently a competition between at least two cooperative solution points. The alternative framing of conflict, which recognizes this, is based on the idea that instead of just one set of terms for peace, there are at least our terms and the terms of the opponent, and often various alternative options between the two extreme terms of peace. This framing corresponds to the standard definition of conflict in which armed conflict is a "contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year" (Gleditsch et al. 2002). In such a definition, the

contestation regarding governance or territory is already a defining factor of what we consider as conflict, while the neoliberal institutionalist idea of enforcing the only reasonable cooperative solution point lacks the genuine contestation between positions related to governance or territory.

### Against Militaristic “Bargaining from The Position of Strength”: Why Is It Not Rational for Europe and East Asia to Promote Their Safety by Relying on US Military Power

All cooperation consists of two elements: on the one hand, cooperation produces mutual benefits compared to the situation in which cooperation did not take place. On the other hand, co-operators need to agree on how to divide the labour and benefits of cooperation or decide on the terms of cooperation. While the first element is mutually beneficial, the latter is conflicting, as agreeing to cooperate on the opponent’s terms often compromises our own interests in cooperation. The problem is that in conflict the former is hostage of the latter: conflicting parties agree on non-violence only if they get acceptable terms of cooperation/peace. In bargaining between rational agents, the one who has more to lose if cooperation fails tends to be the one who must compromise more on their political demands or terms of cooperation. This assumption is not unrealistic among real bargainers: the one more dependent on a negotiated solution tends to be more willing to compromise on terms of cooperation simply because it cannot avoid a bargaining failure where cooperation becomes impossible due to disagreement on the terms of cooperation.

However, in some cases, the one that stands to lose more if bargaining fails may be more persistent in its demands regarding terms of cooperation if yielding to the opponent’s terms is simply too costly for such an actor. Small powers negotiating with big powers may be surprisingly assertive if they are dealing with vital interests in their demand for terms of cooperation, even when they stand to lose much more than that big power if cooperation fails. The US Defense Department has characterized this as an asymmetry of stakes in cooperation: “Some adversaries may perceive their stake in the outcome of the crisis/conflict to be great enough to act regardless of US military superiority. The differential between stakes in the outcome can undermine the effectiveness of deterrence. The US must provide the means to overcome imbalances of stake and power and bolster the credibility of US deterrence strategy and actions.” (US Department of Defense 2006, 4). The risk (expected loss of utility) for a bargainer of failure to reach an agreement on the terms of cooperation, as compared to the dearthness of each of the political demands regarding the terms of cooperation, is what determines the solution point in cooperation. Let us call this risk the “strategic risk” and assume that the one with greater strategic risk will have to yield towards the opponent (until strategic risks are balanced).

Formal rational models of bargaining (Saraydar 1965, 804; Harsanyi 1956; Nash 1950; Zeuthen 1930) explicate this by using the following formula for the definition of whether a rational bargainer A ought to yield in round *i* towards the position of its opponent if and only if:

$$(A_i^a - A_i^b)/(A_i^a - C^a) < (B_i^b - B_i^a)/(B_i^b - C^b)$$

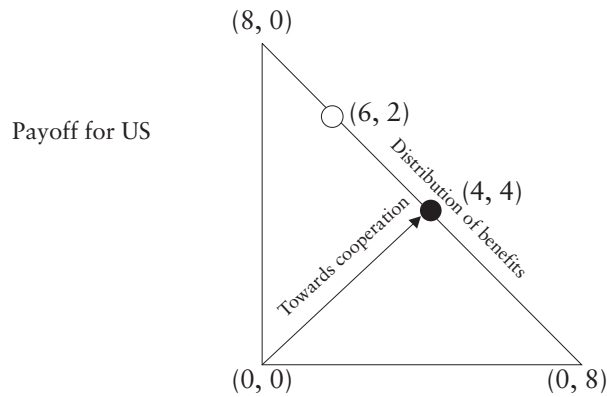


Here we define that at round  $i$  the payoff for player A for peace at A's own terms is  $Ai^a$  while the payoff for A for peace at B's terms is  $Ai^b$  and the payoff for A for a failure of negotiations (and return to war) is  $C^a$ . The payoffs for player B for these same outcomes are  $Bi^a$ ,  $Bi^b$  and  $C^b$ . In the formula above A will have to yield in round  $i$  because A's determination to stick to its own terms of peace ( $Ai^a - Ai^b$ ) divided by its dependence of a negotiated solution ( $Ai^a - C^a$ ) is smaller than that of B. Thus, B is either more determined or A is more dependent on peace, and thus A has to yield in round  $i$ . However, in the next round, once A has already accepted a worse negotiated outcome, its dependence on such outcome is reduced: the utility it now gets if its solution is accepted compared to the failure of negotiation is now smaller, and this gives it leverage. This time it may be that bargainer B needs to yield. This would be the case if in the new round of bargaining  $(Aii^a - Aii^b)/(Aii^a - C^a) > (Bii^b - Bii^a)/(Bii^b - C^b)$ . Rational players will continue the offer-counter offer dialogue until their offers are identical and avoid a conflict.

The formal logic can be verbalized and made easier by talking about the dependence on a negotiated solution ( $Ai^a - C^a$ ) and the determination to stick to one's political demands ( $Ai^a - Ai^b$ ) as the two variables that determine the solution point. Let us use a simplified version of the negotiation and implementation of the Agreed Framework of 1994 (US Department of State 1994) to illustrate this. There North Korea and the US had a dispute regarding North Korea's build-up of graphite reactors for the country's source of energy. The more the US feared that this will enable North Korea to produce fuel for its nuclear weapons, the more determined the country was to prevent such development and the more US had leverage to resist terms of cooperation with North Korea that would have allowed North Korea to continue to build such reactors. If we assume that North Korea needed energy and it had almost ready reactor for that, this, again made North Korea a tough bargainer as it was determined to continue building such reactors because the country needed them for energy production.

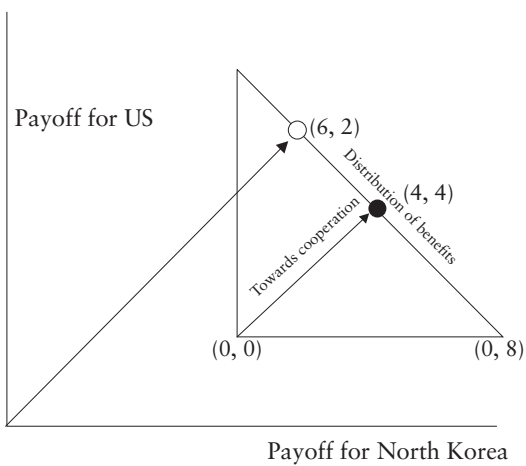
At the same time, US dependence on a solution that allows the US to prevent the build-up of graphite reactors made the US more dependent to offer something else to North Korea if it did not build graphite reactors. Thus, the fear for North Korea's nuclear development made the US more willing to offer help for alternative solutions, such as the replacement of the emerging graphite reactors with light water reactors. This is the simplified core of the eventual agreement according to an account by the US negotiator Robert L. Gallucci (Wit et al. 2004, 54). Due to this dependence, the US needs to promise to fund the development of these alternative solutions. We could imagine that a solution based on US help with light water reactors and some interim energy solutions, while these new reactors were being built, and North Korea's cessation of the buildup of graphite reactors, represented a balance point where the strategic risks (=cost of compromises divided by the risk of negotiation failure) of trying to push the opponent to further compromises were equal for both bargainers, and neither could gain more compromises from the other. In Figure 1 that describes strategic risks this would be point (4,4). The US could not insist on further compromises from North Korea and move to point (6,2), because then the risk to the US of negotiation failure would have been 6 while for North Korea only 2. This the US could not risk, and thus it settled to the balance point.

Figure 1: Simple Bargaining Setting



If then the US, as a militarily more powerful actor, threatened the use of violence unless North Korea accepted solution point (6,2), an outcome where the US did not guarantee the funding of the light water reactors, but just the willingness to try to attract international funding for such reactors, the calculus for strategic risks would have changed. This is the format into which the reality of the Framework Agreement of 1994 could be simplified (Gallucci 1994). The new calculus could be demonstrated by an extended bargaining game structure in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Extended, Coercive Bargaining



When military coercion came into the picture, and since the US was more powerful, it could cause more damage to North Korea than North Korea could to the US, the bargaining failure and return to the coercive situation of non-cooperation would have cost North Korea six additional utility points, but the US only two, compared to the original point of no cooperation. Thus, a solution point at (6,2), with only US facilitation, not commitment, to the funding of the light water reactors, became a rational solution point: both players would now have lost eight utility points compared to the coercive situation of no cooperation at (-2,-6).

As can be seen from Figure 2, military power affects the bargaining leverage of the parties, giving the advantage to the more powerful one. This is true not only in the realm of rational bargaining but also in the real world of diplomacy and

## 7

(Calculated, 28 March 2023, on the basis of data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2023; and Davies, Petterson, and Öberg 2022). The positive correlation is statistically insignificant (coefficient 0,1622,  $n=146$ ,  $p=0.0505$ ), though, thus only proving that emphasis on defence spending does not safeguard citizens from violence. It only improves country's coercive bargaining leverage (and secures political values, even if it does not secure people). This is because bargaining failure is equally likely for strong and weak powers because strong powers, if rational, demand better terms in coercive bargaining, and thus sometimes (equally often as weak powers), demand too much. The correlation between total military expenditure and total number of fatalities is positive and statistically significant, while military expenditure per population is negatively associated with the number of fatalities and per capita fatalities of organised violence, assumingly because of the strong negative association between per capita income and fatalities and per capita fatalities of organised violence. All these correlation tests have been done based on Spearman correlations, given the abnormal distribution of fatalities data.

international security. Beardsley and Asal (2009) have shown that a country stands its ground and does not need to yield from its political demands if it possesses superior military power. Fanlo and Sukin (2023) find the same, but they point out that to measure the difference in bargaining leverage, the disparity in military capacity between the states must be substantial.

However, since bargaining failure is always a result of miscalculation or overconfidence of one's own bargaining position, there is no reason to believe that power positively affects one's risk of bargaining failure. Military power merely alters the solution point, i.e. terms of peace one can negotiate by threatening to use military force, as shown by the two figures above. In the case of the US-North Korean bargain after the Agreed Framework of 1994, the main US implementor of the US commitment in the agreement admitted that "The Agreed Framework was a political orphan within two weeks after its signature" (Behar & Cherry 2009), as due to change of congress the US could not live up to its commitments. While this did not end up leading to an armed conflict between North Korea and the US, it ended the cooperation and eventually, in the beginning of the new millennium, the agreement failed as neither party felt committed to it. In the end, overconfidence and the strategy of reciprocity led to a failure of a negotiated solution. Consequently, the United States now has a nuclear weapons adversary in North Korea, while North Korea is isolated from the West, unable to seriously develop economically or focus on non-military sectors due to perceived threats from the West.

Thus, a powerful actor can still miscalculate and demand too much, just as a weaker power can. For instance, a powerful country may miscalculate and believe it can dictate whether its neighbouring countries are allowed to join a military alliance, while a weaker power might think it can join such alliances even if the neighbouring major power considers the alliance a threat. Hence, according to Nash, military power is not a defence force; rather, it is a bargaining leverage. This surprising fact is caused by the rational actors' strategy to demand more if they are more powerful; otherwise, their bargaining strategy is suboptimal. Therefore, it all comes down to whether one has overconfidence in one's own position, which can lead to demanding too much. This can happen as easily to a powerful country as to a weaker one, according to the theory of rational bargaining.

When we look at the most powerful nations in the world, such as the US, UK, France, or Russia, we can see that each experiences losses of life due to war. At the same time, many weaker states and even countries with no standing armies, such as Iceland, Costa Rica, Mauritius, or Monaco, may have to accept terms defined by others, yet they do not suffer losses due to organized violence. Since failure to reach a negotiated outcome is not dependent on military power, strong and weak powers tend to end up in conflicts equally often (strong powers just with more extravagant demands for the terms of peace). If we compare countries and use SIPRI data (from March 2023) on the average share of military expenditure per GDP during 2017-2021, we realize that the correlation between military spending and the per capita number of fatalities from organized violence is positive, not negative. Thus, the more a country spends on defence as a proportion of its GDP, the less safe its population is from organized violence!<sup>7</sup> Therefore, also in the real world, not just in Nash's world of rational actors, military power does not improve safety; it only improves coercive bargaining leverage. Military aid from the US to European and East Asian allies does not bring peace to the two regions. At the same time, it increases the likelihood of fatalities from violence in Russia, North

Korea, and China. However, if peace remains in the two regions, it is likely to be anchored to terms that are more beneficial to American allies than if US power did not assist the two regions.

If, however, the overwhelming power is with a supranational organization, such as the UN, it is more likely that the terms of peace in East Asia and Europe are defined by consensus and dialogue on justice rather than the balance of military power. Supranational power, unlike partisan power, can also increase safety from war, as it does not tend to increase demands. While it is rational for a partisan negotiator to demand more if they are more powerful than their adversary, the UN does not have adversaries as it is owned by all powers. Thus, it also does not have a rational imperative to demand more. For example, if the UN enforces a norm on sovereignty, it cannot enforce even more sovereignty if it is more powerful, as the optimum demand for the UN is a balance that satisfies all powers, not just one partisan power. Thus, in the theory of rational agents, it would be possible to imagine that the UN could, unlike neoliberal institutionalist partisan powers, enforce norms and increase safety through overwhelming power. This also seems to be true in the real world of international relations, as if we compare the earlier presented dismal track record of unilateral great power intervention to the track record of UN peacekeeping, we can see a drastic difference. While only 2 of the 16 unilateral interventions by great powers reduced fatalities or kept them to zero, during the operation, 29 of the 36 post-Cold War UN peacekeeping missions achieved that. While 6 of the 16 unilateral operations left the country better off after the operation than before it, 27 of the 36 UN operations achieved that (Kivimäki 2023). Clearly, the UN has a better track record, and thus if East Asia and Europe want peace and safety for their citizens from organized violence, they should rely on and strengthen the UN rather than US dominance.

### For Direct Dialogue with Potential Enemies: Why Is It Not Rational for East Asia and Europe to Merely Rely on Alliances for Their Security?

If conflict is, as both rational models and empirical evidence suggest, a function of bargaining failure caused by overconfidence in one's bargaining leverage, it seems clear that peace requires dialogue and information sharing. During the era of *détente*, such dialogue and exchange of information were fostered by means of interactions on multiple levels and various topics. This should be promoted, as was the case during *détente*, while political contacts should be encouraged among ordinary people, research organizations, officials, including intelligence apparatuses, politicians, and heads of state. The starting point of *détente* was created with the help of middlemen and facilitators of interaction. While it was politically controversial for the US president to meet the leader of Communist China, controversies were avoided by means of secrecy. Pakistani military leader, and later head of state, Yahya Khan, helped with contacts, making it possible for the US and China to proceed to high-level meetings in the absence of political critique (Warner 2005; Lee 2016). The US and Soviet Union used extensive back-channel diplomacy to interact directly without attacks from the opposition or media. The connection between President Richard Nixon's Security Adviser, and later Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, and Anatoly Dobrynin of the Soviet

Embassy in Washington DC is an excellent example of such dialogue facilitation (Burr 2007; Moss 2017; Porter 2017; Dobrynin 2001). Direct contacts between Nixon and the Soviet leaders were initiated even before Nixon was officially sworn into office, as Nixon and Kissinger kept in touch through a KGB official, Boris Sedov, of the Soviet Embassy (Moss 2017, 22). Finally, contacts were institutionalized on various levels by establishing the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) (Scrivner 1976; Nimetz 1980).

Today, even access to the media of the other adversary has been blocked in the name of “information warfare” (Moon 2022). Meetings of presidents in opposing camps are considered almost treacherous, as was the case with President Donald Trump’s meeting with President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki in 2018 (Hill 2021) or naive, as during Trump’s summits with Kim Jong-un (Chang 2019). Meetings between president-elects’ security advisors (Michael Flynn) and formally accredited diplomats are seen as sinister and illegal, despite the precedents set by Kissinger and Dobrynin, and even Kissinger and Sedov. While there have been South Korean back-channel facilitations to help Trump’s summit diplomacy towards North Korea, and at least German, French, Israeli, and Turkish efforts to facilitate dialogue between Ukraine and Russia, much of the main approach to dialogue in the West and in Russia has been negative. The cease-fire agreement between Ukraine and Russia in April 2022 was blocked by the Western, mainly US and UK objectives (UK Prime Minister’s Office 2022), and as a result, war continues, and people keep on dying in war. Similarly, the conflict in Syria had a possible solution in sight, but it was prevented due to resistance from the UK and US (Borger and Inzaurrealde 2015; Ahtisaari 2014).

There is a possible answer as to why it has been so difficult for Europe and East Asia to establish good relations and dialogue directly with their neighbouring adversaries. If we revert to the game theoretical logic of bargaining, we can see that bargainers gain leverage if their opponents are dependent on successful negotiation outcomes. This applies not only to potential enemies but also to alliance partners. Thus, if US allies in East Asia and Europe feel that their safety depends on the US, they are more willing to ‘pay back’ for US protection. Before delving into the question of how allies repay the senior ally’s protection, it is important to remember that US power does not offer protection against war (avoiding over-confidence does) but rather it offers leverage for negotiation and the preservation of certain values through the threat of military power. Therefore, the notion of our terms of peace as the only natural form of peace deceives junior allies regarding the significance of the senior ally. If the US retains control over its military power, and if military power only safeguards specific political values, then US troops in Western Europe or Japan naturally safeguard US values rather than Japanese or Western European values. Thus, ‘US protection’ of its junior allies does not truly entail the protection of Europeans or Japanese, nor of European or Japanese values. Yet, US values may often align more closely with the values of US allies, especially when compared to the values of Russia, China, or North Korea. This is the reason why US allies are dependent on US protection, especially if US allies are at odds with their neighbouring US enemies.

According to Ringsmose, the bargaining dynamic between European allies and the US entails a quid pro quo, wherein the US nuclear umbrella and defence support in Europe against Russia necessitate Western European participation in operations that these countries would not otherwise engage in, such as those in Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Ringsmose 2010). The more European allies fear

Russia, the more tense the relationship with their eastern neighbour, the more dependent US protection is, and thus, the more they will have to pay for such protection by participating in US global operations.

Japanese payment for the US protection differs somewhat from European payments due to its restrictive pacifist constitution. Instead of extensive participation in US operations, Japan compensates the US in other ways. Under the current US-Japanese agreement, Japan has consented to pay 1.06 trillion yen (\$9.33 billion) to share the upkeep of the 54,000 U.S. military personnel stationed in Japan over five years (Reuters 2021). The logic of US bargaining, based on its ally's dependence on US protection from neighbouring US enemies, was also most explicitly demonstrated in the negotiations between the US and South Korea in 2019, when President Trump demanded a 500% increase in South Korea's contribution toward hosting 28,000 US troops referring to the tension South Korea had with North Korea and with China (DePetris 2019). In addition to financial payments, the type of involvement in distant US operations, as described by Ringsmose as a quid pro quo for US protection, is increasing for East Asian allies as relations with China and North Korea deteriorate. Despite the compromises required by Japan's interpretation of its constitution, its strained relations with China and North Korea, and its dependence on US protection from these nations, Japan is compelled to increase its involvement. This was articulated explicitly by Folk in his Forbes magazine article titled "Japan And U.S. Will Deepen Military Ties As Tensions With China Rise" (Folk, 2024). South Korea's willingness to compromise its laws related to arms support to war powers is another example of how dependence on US protection costs support to US global strategies (Mckenzie 2023).

If US allies were not dependent on the US for protection from Russia, China, or North Korea, they would not feel obliged to pay for US military bases or to support US global operations. Finding ways to deal with potential enemies would, therefore, be useful only for the allies, but not for the US. Here, the logic of bargaining puts the US and its allies in a conflict of interests, yet one that has not been openly discussed. When President Emmanuel Macron exercises his prerogative of independent diplomacy and talks to Putin, his efforts are generally not appreciated. When the former President of Korea, Moon Jae-in, developed South Korea's direct diplomacy towards China and North Korea, this too, was against the US interests in the US-allied bargaining game. Finally, when East Asian allies want to keep good relations both with the US and with China, this is seen in the US as undermining the alliance relationship, even though it is behaviour that is clearly in the interests of the East Asian allies. This is simply to keep allies dependent on the US, to improve US bargaining leverage towards its allies (Anderson and Meaney 2023). All this makes sense only if we view it as a bargaining relationship between allies and the US: the more there is antagonism between China and US allies, the more allies need the US. The more allies need US protection, the greater their strategic risk in their negotiation with the US, and thus the greater the US leverage towards its allies.

## Conclusions

US relations with its allies have been mutually beneficial. Thus, there is every reason to hope that such a relationship continues as a close and friendly one. Yet, this relationship seems to be growing more asymmetric and this may become a problem for South Korea, Japan and the EU. This would not be good for the relationship itself, while it would especially be bad for the safety of US-European and East Asian allies from organized violence. This article has shown, through game theoretical modelling and empirical testing (or by referencing existing empirical evidence), that there are three rational reasons why US allies in East Asia and Europe should not rely too much on US military power for their safety from war.

Firstly, this article demonstrated that US military power cannot enforce norms that we would like to see in the rulebook of European and East Asian security and diplomacy. Partisan norm enforcement, based on reciprocity in a context of differing constructions of the world and the conflict situation, necessarily leads to the escalation rather than de-escalation of organized violence. This is because conflict situations have multiple solution points, whereas the strategy based on reciprocity assumes a situation in which there is only one reasonable cooperative solution point that both parties recognize. While this can be the case in very exceptional situations, it is not normally how conflicts pan out. Global evidence and evidence from East Asia and Europe clearly show that this game theoretical reasoning is correct: peace should be negotiated, not approached by enforcing partisan visions of fairness and justice.

Secondly, the idea of bargaining from the position of strength does not seem to offer safety from violence. Thus, relying on US military power in European or East Asian coercive bargains does not offer security. The logic of coercion suggests that rational agents tend to increase their demands with growing military strength, and thus, they are quite as likely to overestimate their bargaining leverage. Consequently, they can equally often, like weak powers, demand too much in security bargains.

Again, global evidence and evidence from East Asia and Europe prove that the game theoretical reasoning is correct. Strong rational powers can equally well end up in bargaining failure and war. Empirical evidence also proves this: military expenditure as a share of GDP is not negatively correlated with fatalities of organized violence per population. Strength against Russia, China or North Korea has rather provoked these countries than safeguarded East Asia and Europe from organised violence. Thus, relying on US military power in allied bargaining with Russia, China, and North Korea is not wise. Instead, building the strength of the UN system could work better.

Finally, this paper has shown that, if allies cannot achieve safety through reliance on external military power, they need to focus on independent dialogue with their potential enemies. Good relations with Russia, China, and North Korea may lead to political compromises, but they also lead to greater safety from war. Dialogue and openness to the exchange of information should not be prevented by dubious “strategic concerns” of information warfare and secrecy norms. There is a reason why such strategic concerns are often referred to, but such reasons may actually have more to do with US vs. allied bargaining than with the interests of US allies at peace. Learning interpretations of the opponent is seen as being

exposed to the information attack of the enemy, while dialogue with the “enemy” is seen as treacherous. This mindset needs to change. Peace requires dialogue, not information control or secrecy. Intelligent people of East Asia and Europe will be able to differentiate falsehoods from truths, they do not need to be guided by their states in the pattern of “guided democracies.” As Finland’s President Urho Kekkonen had a habit of saying, peace does not require building walls, it requires opening doors.

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