

What's So Special About the Special Relationship?

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What Is The Special Relationship?

What makes the Anglo-American relationship “special”? One answer holds that the relationship is special in terms of the influence that the weaker power, Britain, exerts over its stronger ally (Watt, 1986, 4). The relationship is special or unusual because Britain exercises degrees of influence on the United States far greater than a comparison of the two states’ capabilities would lead one to expect. This influence comes not from material resources that Britain threatens to withhold or promises to give, but from a process of persuasion that alters American decision makers’ perceptions of their interests.

Most analyses of persuasion in politics explain its success or failure as a function of shared values or norms. Shared political values such as democratic institutions, systems of common law, and language are often cited as an important source of the special relationship (Brogan, 1964; Turner, 1971). Shared norms or values may be an important reason why attempts at persuasion succeed. But I want to argue in the next section that persuasion also can occur without reference to them. Drawing of rational choice analysis of the role of communication in bargaining, I develop a model of persuasion that depends on two elements: causal uncertainty and commitment. Attempts at persuasion are most likely to succeed when the target is uncertain about the net benefits that will flow from available policy choices and trusts that the persuader shares similar interests in the outcome of their action.

The subsequent section evaluates the plausibility of this understanding of persuasion through an analysis of the negotiation of the North Atlantic Treaty. The North Atlantic Treaty involved a fundamental change in American foreign policy, committing the United States to the defense of continental Europe, but was instigated British rather than American political leaders. The success of this episode of persuasion is consistent with the theoretical rationale advanced in the paper. British attempts to persuade the United States to ally with western Europe only succeeded when American decision-makers were uncertain about which course of action open to them would best secure their goals, and were assured that Britain and other European countries were themselves committed to providing for their own defense in important ways. The concluding section discusses possible alternative explanations of the case and sketches some of the implications of the theory advanced here for theorizing about international politics.

Persuasion in International Politics

What is persuasion? Under what conditions are attempts to persuade successful? I define persuasion as attempts by one state (or other international actor, such as a non-governmental organization) to convince another to alter its foreign policy without recourse to material incentives or punishments. Persuasion is thus a form of power, but one that operates by changing its target’s beliefs or preferences, not by directly manipulating the payoffs that that target will accrue from each of the actions available to it.

The most prominent body of research that addresses the question of when persuasion is successful draws on the constructivist framework for analyzing international politics. Constructivism holds that under certain conditions materially weak actors such as small states and non-governmental organizations exercise influence by persuading powerful actors to change their preferences over outcomes and actions. Persuasion is most likely to be effective when the target is motivated to collect new information and lacks strongly held preferences, when the persuader and

target share important values, and the persuader presents reasoned arguments in private rather than makes demands (Checkel, 2001, 562-3; Johnson, 2001, 496-99; Risse, 2000, 33).

Risse-Kappen's *Cooperation Among Democracies* (1995) is a sophisticated effort to develop such ideas and to use them to understand why materially weak European states influenced American foreign policy during the cold war. Risse-Kappen holds that the most fundamental explanation for such influence is that all of these states were liberal democracies, which led them to de-emphasize power asymmetries when bargaining with each other. The United States and European countries saw each other as members of a community based on shared values, such as the peaceful settlement of disputes. This sense of common identity was reinforced by norms of consultation through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which allowed the European governments to voice their concerns to the United States. The openness of American political institutions gave European officials the opportunity to form transnational networks with their American counterparts and to mobilize support for their positions among domestic political actors. Risse-Kappen documents in great detail that other members of NATO were able to exert significant influence on American policy choices during the Korean War, arms control negotiations, and the Cuban missile crisis. Furthermore, he demonstrates that this influence did not derive from the European states' material capabilities, since most of these issues did not directly concern European security and the United States did not need its European allies' material support to achieve its ends.

In the remainder of this section I develop a complimentary explanation of persuasion based on rational choice theories of strategic information transmission or "cheap talk". Cheap talk theories model situations in which communication between players does not directly affect their payoffs.¹ Decision-makers have a fixed ranking of preferences over the outcomes they wish to achieve through their foreign policy actions. They also hold rank-ordered preferences over the foreign policy actions available to them, favoring those that they believe to have the highest likelihood of achieving their desired outcomes. According to the cheap talk account, successful attempts at persuasion lead the target to revise these subjective probability estimates, or causal beliefs, about the payoffs associated with each action.

Consider a situation in which one state—the persuader—attempts to persuade another state—the target—to alter its foreign policy in a manner that the persuader posits will deliver net benefits to both. The target will accept this proposal only when both of two conditions are met. The first is causal uncertainty. Decision makers in the target state face some degree of uncertainty about which of the actions available to them will maximize their utility. When this uncertainty about the causal relationships between actions and outcomes is low, they consider their causal beliefs to be an accurate guide to the net benefits that will result from each action. In such situations the persuader's proposal is superfluous, since the target's decision-makers would either reject the proposal (if they believed that adopting it would reduce their welfare) or adopt it regardless of the persuader's position (if they believed that doing so would increase their welfare). Higher levels of causal uncertainty open a window for attempts at persuasion to succeed. When their causal uncertainty is high, decision makers in the target state search for and evaluate new information about the payoffs from each foreign policy action, and more seriously consider the possibility that the causal beliefs

1. The seminal paper is Crawford and Sobel (1982). Literature reviews in economics include Farrell and Rabin (1996) and in political science Austen-Smith (1992). Applications to international politics are Goldsmith and Posner (2002), Morrow (1994) and Sartori (2002).

underlying the persuader's proposal might better capture the true relationships between actions and outcomes.

Decision makers are most likely to face causal uncertainty when their current action begins to produce unsatisfactory outcomes. This perceived failure leads decision-makers to revise downwards their estimates of the causal relationship between this action and their payoffs and revise upwards their estimates of the payoffs that will result from alternative actions. Unanticipated policy failure not only reveals the inadequacy of the causal beliefs that motivated the selection of the current action, but also exposes decision-makers to public criticism and demands for more effective policy, providing them with self-interested reasons to consider causal beliefs that previously had been marginalized in policy debates. There is empirical support across a wide array of issue areas that policy failure prompts changes in the causal beliefs underpinning foreign policy. Scholars have used policy failure, sometimes in combination with other variables, to explain major changes in security policy (Checkel, 1997; Jervis, 1976, 275-9; Levy, 1994, 304-5, Nye, 1987, 376; Reiter, 1996; Thomas, 1999), international economic policy cooperation and the negotiation and collapse of international monetary agreements (McNamara, 1998; Odell, 1982, 371), macroeconomic policy changes in developed and developing countries (Hall, 1993; Hira, 1998, 27), the development of the welfare state (Hecló, 1974, 315-18); organizational behavior and learning (Levitt and March, 1988; Perrow, 1984), and the diffusion of policies across polities (Rose, 1993, 50-76).

The second necessary condition for successful persuasion is that the target perceive the persuader to hold preferences over outcomes similar to its own. Even if it believes the persuader to have superior causal knowledge, it still might reject the persuader's proposal if it fears the two states do not share similar preferences over the outcome that results from the action it selects. When decision-makers in the target state believe that their counterparts in the persuading state wish to secure the same outcomes, they know that the persuader has an incentive to communicate honestly its estimates of the consequences of its proposal. But if the persuader holds divergent preferences over outcomes, it might deliberately communicate incorrect estimates to convince the target to select the action that produces the outcome most favorable to the persuader. The target state's estimate of the degree to which the two states share similar preferences may be based on previous interactions with persuader, experiences interacting with other states in similar situations, or general beliefs about international behavior. The persuader can attempt to bolster its reputation for shared preferences by taking actions that demonstrate its commitment to its proposal regardless of the actions of the target. In game-theoretic terms, the persuader can undertake "costly signals," or actions that only a state that shared preferences with the target would implement (Austen-Smith and Banks, 2000).

Figure 1. Conditions for Persuasion

	Low Causal Uncertainty	High Causal Uncertainty
Divergent Preferences	Unsuccessful Persuasion	Unsuccessful Persuasion
Similar Preferences	Unsuccessful Persuasion	Successful Persuasion

Figure 1 summarizes the conditions for successful persuasion. The two independent variables, causal uncertainty and preference similarity, are arrayed on the horizontal and vertical axes. The target accepts the persuader's proposal only when causal uncertainty is high and it perceives the persuader as sharing its preferences over outcomes. In this case it acknowledges the possibility that the persuader has more accurate knowledge of the relationships between actions and outcomes, and trusts the persuader to communicate this knowledge honestly. When causal uncertainty is high and perceived preferences are divergent, the target concludes that the persuader has more accurate causal beliefs. But the target is unwilling to trust the latter's communication of these beliefs, fearing they have been manipulated to convince the target into selecting the action that will deliver maximum benefits to the persuader. If the target perceives similar preferences and low causal uncertainty, it trusts the communication from the persuader but has little reason to believe that the persuader's causal beliefs are superior to its own and will reject the proposal. The combination of low causal uncertainty and divergent preferences leads the target to conclude that the persuader does not possess superior knowledge and that the persuader will manipulate its knowledge to serve its own ends.

Persuasion and the North Atlantic Treaty

This section evaluates the theory of persuasion developed above through a case study of the negotiation of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1948 and 1949. What became the North Atlantic Treaty was first proposed by British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin to United States Secretary of State George Marshall in late 1947. Until this point American decision-makers had resisted calls to provide a formal security guarantee to western Europe. Consistent with the theory developed here, I conclude that two developments led them to change policy on this question. First, more intense conflicts with the Soviet Union, particularly the breakdown of negotiations over the future status of occupied Germany, led American decision-makers to question their initial strategy of cooperating with the Soviets and to search for alternative ways of stabilizing western Europe. Bevin's proposal to achieve this goal through an alliance came at a time when American decision-makers were open to reconsidering the merits of alternative approaches. Second, the British supported their argument about the importance of a formal guarantee for western European security by providing one themselves through the March 1948 Brussels Pact, in which Britain pledged to defend western

Europe, and by reorienting British war-fighting strategy from abandoning to defending the continent. This committed Britain to the military defense of western Europe and demonstrated to the United States that Britain shared its goals in this regard and was itself willing to back up this desire with concrete action.

Two types of evidence support these contentions. The first is the congruence between the values of the independent variables and the dependent variable over time within the case. I divide the case into three time periods corresponding to different values of the independent variables. In the first time period, lasting until late 1947, American decision-makers face low causal uncertainty about their strategy of negotiating with the Soviet Union, leading them to reject the idea of a security guarantee for western Europe that might antagonize the Soviets. In the second period, beginning in late 1947 with the breakdown of negotiations with the Soviet Union over the future status of occupied Germany, American decision-makers are less certain that engagement with the Soviet Union will succeed and are willing to consider alternative strategies more seriously, including that of a western military alliance. However, they are concerned that Britain and other European countries desire such an alliance so that the United States will bear the brunt of the costs of securing Europe. In the third period, after March 1948, the signing of the Brussels Pact by Britain and other European countries assuages this American concern by demonstrating that the Europeans are committed to providing for their own security. It is only in this third period that both of the independent variables—causal uncertainty and preference convergence—take on the values that are expected to produce successful persuasion.

The second type of evidence is the private speech and writing of senior American decision-makers in the State Department, Pentagon, and White House during the negotiation of the North Atlantic Treaty. This private speech indicates that American decision-makers did become more attracted to the idea of a western alliance as their uncertainty about the likelihood of success of their current strategy of engaging with the Soviet Union declined. It also demonstrates that the key reason they held off from accepting Bevin's proposal immediately was their concern that Britain and other European states hoped to rely on American military support while devoting few resources to their own militaries, and that the signing of the Brussels Pact did a great deal to reduce this concern.

The theory of persuasion developed here compliments, rather than competes with, other explanations of when one state influences another to change its foreign policy. My goal is to establish the plausibility of this theory rather than to demonstrate its superiority over other explanations of such influence. For this reason I have chosen a case which holds constant other plausible causes of policy change. Focusing on a short period of time reduces the possibility that other variables changed in such a way that they influenced the negotiations. For example, Britain had significant material capabilities that made it a useful ally of the United States, including a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, intelligence capabilities, a stable political system, large military forces, and the willingness to spend more on defense than most other European countries (Buchan, 1976, 660; Watt, 1986, 4). In making their argument for a formal American security guarantee, British policymakers also could draw on many of the sources of influence discussed in the constructivist literature, such as a common set of political values, institutionalized ties to their American counterparts, and close, regular, and confidential high-level meetings. These material and ideational capabilities may have contributed to British leverage during the negotiation of the North Atlantic Treaty. The point is that they did not change in value significantly between the time when Bevin proposed a security treaty in December 1947 and the time the United States accepted this

proposal some three months later. But the two variables identified in the previous section— causal uncertainty and preference similarity— *did* change in important ways during this period.

Causal Uncertainty

Bevin approached Marshall after the close of the London Conference of Foreign Ministers of Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States. The primary agenda item for the Conference was the future status of occupied Germany, and the meeting collapsed when it became clear that the foreign ministers were no closer to reaching agreement on this issue than they had been since the close of the Second World War. Bevin proposed to Marshall that “we must devise some western democratic system comprising the Americans, ourselves, France, Italy, etc., and of course the Dominions. This would not be a formal alliance, but an understanding backed by power, money and resolute action. It would be a sort of spiritual federation of the west. . . it would then be clear to the Soviet Union that having gone so far they could not advance any further. . . The essential task was to create confidence in Western Europe that further Communist inroads would be stopped” (Cook, 1989, 110). Marshall’s initial response to this informal suggestion was non-committal but encouraging. He replied that for the moment he preferred to focus on more immediate steps, such as the creation of a west German government. But he did not reject the proposal outright, as American decision-makers had in the recent past, instead expressing interest and instructing subordinates to seek additional information from their British counterparts (Department of State 1947, 811-12, 815-822; Department of State 1948, 5).

This was not the first time that American decision-makers had faced a call to create a western alliance, but it was the first time that they took such a call seriously. The Truman administration had moved quickly after the termination of hostilities against Japan to distance the United States from Britain, abruptly ending Lend-Lease and quickly winding down the Combined Boards that coordinated the Anglo-American war effort, in part to avoid “conveying the impression that London and Washington were “ganging up” on Russia” (Hathaway, 1990, 12). In his famous “Iron Curtain” speech attended by President Truman in 1946, former British prime minister Winston Churchill had advocated an alliance between the United States, Britain, and other countries against the Soviet Union; Truman publicly distanced himself from Churchill’s remarks. Canadian decision-makers, including external affairs minister Louis St. Laurent and official Escott Reid, in August and September 1947 promoted the creation of a regional self-defense organization. In the United States Hamilton Fish Armstrong, editor of *Foreign Affairs*, called for the creation of a similar institution and Dean Rusk, the State Department official responsible for United Nations affairs, had considered the advantages of a defensive treaty with selected countries. None of these proposals evoked even the hint of a positive response from senior American decision-makers (Armstrong, 1947; Owendale, 1985, 66; Reid, 1977, 33; Yergin, 1977, 174-7).

Until late 1947 American officials saw few advantages to formally allying with western Europe. American occupation forces remained in Germany and any military threat to western Europe inevitably would implicate the United States. Military planners feared an alliance would divert resources from the development of new weapons such as atomic bombs and missiles. But the most important reason was that American officials held out the hope that they could reach a comprehensive settlement with the Soviet Union on the security of Europe. During the course of 1946 and especially in 1947 they increasingly came to see Soviet-inspired subversion as the key threat to continental security. The failure of their policy of attempting to cooperate with the Soviet Union led the United States devote more attention to countering the appeals of domestic Communist

parties by implementing the through the Truman Doctrine and Marshall plan and encouraging political integration in western Europe (Trachtenberg, 62-3).

The final break with the Soviets came at the Conference of Foreign Ministers in December 1947. Marshall and Bevin held out little hope that the meeting would result in success, an expectation that proved correct when the meeting collapsed without any agreements or decisions to meet again. The British, Americans, and French responded quickly in December 1947 and January 1948 by moving towards the creation of a west German state (Trachtenberg, 1999, 69-72). American decision-makers worried that this step would lead to much worse relations with the Soviets and had few ideas about how the western powers could counter the expected renewal of Soviet moves. This was certainly the impression of the British team, one of whom wrote in an internal memo at the time that the Americans 'have no clear idea of what to do after the Conference if it ends in deadlock' (quoted in Deighton, 1990, 211; see also pp. 231-2). And Marshall's reply to Bevin's call after the collapse of the conference for a Western Union indicated that the Secretary of State had given thought to the immediate steps concerning Germany he wanted to take but did not have strong ideas about the value of a military alliance.

Bevin's proposal was well-timed to take advantage of the renewed uncertainty in American policymaking circles about the future behavior of the Soviet Union and the best way to provide security for western Europe. It served to direct American thinking about European security towards the idea of a military alliance and away from other options. As the ensuing debate within the administration and with key members of Congress made clear, there were other viable steps that the United States could have taken to achieve the end of securing western Europe. Some combination of Marshall aid, a unilateral presidential guarantee to defend western Europe, military assistance, and the creation of an alliance with membership limited to western Europe but supported informally by the United States were all circulated by American officials or members of Congress in the coming months. Bevin's proposal placed the option of an alliance at the center of the debate.

Bevin issued a written proposal on 13 January 1948 to the American and European governments which called for the creation of "some form of union in Western Europe, whether of a formal or informal character, backed by the Americans and by the Dominions" (Cook, 1989, 114), and within the week Marshall met with British ambassador Lord Inverchapel to discuss the idea. Marshall stated that "I wish to see the United States do everything which it properly can in assisting the European nations in bringing a project along this line to fruition" but that he preferred to defer consideration of American participation until after having discussed the issue with the his officials, the President, and key members of Congress (Henderson, 1982, 4-5).

Bevin's proposal led to a split among American foreign policy officials. All seem to have shared a belief that the Soviet Union posed a threat to western Europe, but they differed on their estimation of how successful a military alliance would be in countering such a threat. George Kennan, then director of policy planning at State and Charles Bohlen, the department's counselor, advocated supporting the Europeans with a unilateral security guarantee and military equipment, but opposed a military alliance as irrelevant for the threat of internal Communist subversion and unnecessarily provocative towards the Soviet Union (Kennan, 1967, 398-400; Bohlen does not mention this opposition to an alliance in his memoirs [Bohlen, 1973, 267] but it comes out clearly in the documentary record; see Department of State 1948, 109). The Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense James Forrestal worried that an alliance would require the commitment of more military resources to Europe than were currently available (Leffler, 1992, 212) and suggested that the

President offer a unilateral security guarantee to the western European countries rather than sign a treaty (Wiebes and Zeeman, 1983, 355). John Hickerson and Theodore Achilles of State's Office of European Affairs lobbied Marshall throughout early 1948 to commit the United States to a European alliance (Best, 1986, 162; Department of State 1948, 41).

Bevin used every opportunity to impress upon Marshall and other Americans the importance of rapidly concluding a military pact. In late February he argued that the Communist-led overthrow of the democratically elected government of Czechoslovakia could be repeated in western Europe (Department of State 1948, 32-3). On March 8 Inverchapel used what turned out to be an inaccurate rumor of Soviet pressure on Norway to warn Marshall about the threat of Communist subversion and to repeat Bevin's call for an alliance (Department of State 1948, 46-48). Three days later Bevin wrote to Marshall to draw his attention to recent Soviet actions against Czechoslovakia, Norway, and Finland, arguing that these demonstrated the necessity of rapidly negotiating an "Atlantic Approaches Pact of Mutual Assistance" including the United States. He argued that through this "[w]e could at once inspire the necessary confidence to consolidate the West against Soviet infiltration and at the same time inspire the Soviet Government with enough respect for the West to remove temptation from them" (Cook, 1989, 125).

Commitment

While Marshall was not opposed to the idea of an alliance with Britain and other European countries, he declined to commit the United States to this objective throughout early 1948. It does not seem that Marshall shared the concerns of Kennan and Bohlen that an alliance would serve little purpose other than to antagonize the Soviets. Instead, he worried that a security guarantee from the United States through an alliance would lead the western European states to take few steps to provide for their own security. The Americans communicated to the British that their key concern with his proposal for a Western Union was that left open the possibility that the west European states would rely too heavily on American atomic forces, ground units, and military assistance, and that the United States government could not commit to join it until they saw concrete indications that Britain and other European countries would make more significant sacrifices to provide for their security. Theodore Achilles (1980, 12), who was Director of the Division of Western European Affairs at State during this period, would later write that the United States government responded to British and European calls for an alliance with the attitude "[s]how us what you are prepared to do for yourselves and each other and then we will see what we can do." In a conversation with Inverchapel in Washington in mid-January, Hickerson said that if the Europeans felt they could not proceed with a formal organization on their own but required American help, the United States would be "sympathetically disposed and would at least give it very careful consideration... The important aspect of this question was, however, that any such concept should be and should give the impression that it is based primarily on European initiative" (Department of State 1948, 11). The American desire to see Britain and other European states commit themselves to the defense of the continent is clearly reflected in the discussions between Undersecretary of State Robert Lovett and Inverchapel that took place on 26 January. Bevin instructed Inverchapel to propose to Lovett that the United States "consider with Great Britain entering into a general commitment to go to war with an aggressor and reinforce the Western European defense project." Lovett replied that such a commitment would amount to a military alliance and that the United States was unwilling to consider such a pledge before the Europeans themselves had taken steps in this direction, arguing that the British request amounted to "in effect asking us to pour concrete before we see the blueprints" (Henderson, 1982, 7-8; Department of State 1948, 21-3). He went on to hint that the

United States would consider it if the Europeans committed themselves first, writing to Inverchapel after their meeting that “[w]hen there is evidence of unity with a firm determination to effect an arrangement under which the various European countries are prepared to act in concert to defend themselves, the U.S. will carefully consider the part it might appropriately play in support of such a Western Union” (Department of State 1948, 17-18).

Bevin already had concluded that his appeals for American support would fall on deaf ears until he could convince the British government, as well as the governments of other European countries, to take the concrete steps the United States was demanding. He thus focused his attention in January and February 1948 on negotiating a military alliance with the other west European states and revising British military doctrine to hold that British forces would be committed in large numbers to the defense of continental Europe. At the same time he was trying to convince the Americans to commit themselves to an Atlantic pact, Bevin was negotiating the Western Union with other European countries. Bevin’s overriding goal in creating the Western Union was to convince the Americans that Britain and other west European states were serious about contributing to the defense of the continent. He knew that the European countries could not defend themselves against a Soviet invasion and would have to rely on direct United States support, and saw a Western Union as a way to demonstrate to the Americans his country’s commitment to this goal. Gladwyn Jebb, the foreign office official responsible for negotiating the pact, later summarized Bevin’s thinking in the following terms: “[w]hat seemed certain was that the more the Europeans showed willing, the more the Americans were likely to do” (Jebb, 1972, 214). The first tack of Bevin’s diplomacy resulted in the signing of the Brussels pact and creation of the Western Union defensive alliance by Britain, France, and the Benelux countries on 17 March. The Brussels pact marked an important change in Britain’s diplomatic commitment to European security. This change is clear when the pact’s provisions are compared with those of the Anglo-French Dunkirk Treaty signed 1947. The Dunkirk Treaty committed Britain to the defense of France, but Bevin had been careful to limit the treaty’s specific commitments as much as possible. The Dunkirk treaty identified only Germany as the aggressor, pledged that Britain would come to France’s aid only in the event of a direct attack (rather than the looser “menace” that the French preferred), and did not require that the British and French engage in staff talks to plan for war. The Dunkirk treaty merely committed Britain to come to France’s aid in the case of direct attack—a step the British surely would have taken without the existence of such a treaty (Greenwood, 1983; Ovendale, 1985, 62). In contrast, the Brussels pact committed Britain to come to the assistance of France as well as the Benelux countries, did not restrict the conditions under which such aid could be offered, did not identify the aggressor country, and included provisions for staff talks among the signatories.

Bevin’s second tack was to revise Britain’s war-fighting doctrine to give priority to defending western Europe. He intended this change to serve as a signal to the Americans that Britain was committed to contributing in important ways to the defense of western Europe. Before January 1948 British strategy in case of Soviet attack called for a rapid withdrawal of occupation forces from Germany and counterattacks by air from bases in Britain and the Mideast. Military planners and senior political figures, including the prime minister, had agreed to this strategy on the grounds that Britain could not mobilize sufficient ground forces to defend the continent. In a meeting with prime minister Clement Atlee on 6 February, Bevin and Field Marshall Montgomery, then the chief of the Imperial General Staff, argued that a defense of the continent was necessary for political reasons. Atlee was initially skeptical of this approach but persuaded by Bevin’s argument that such a change would be they keystone of the Western Union and would convince the United States to commit itself to Europe. By March 17 the Chiefs of Staff had outlined a new strategy that replaced defense

of the Mideast with the defense of continental Europe as the country's top priority in a war with the Soviet Union (Best, 1986, 179-80; Montgomery, 1958, 498-501; Ovendale, 1985, 71-2).

American military and diplomatic officials were well-informed about these changes. British military officials coordinated their war plans with American counterparts in April 1948 after the Czech coup led to fears of Soviet military activity in Germany. The British committed their existing forces on the continent to remain and fight rather than immediately withdrawal, as had been envisioned in earlier plans (Best, 1986, 180-1). Updated British war plans, communicated to Americans in discussions in July, declared that British aim was now to stop invasion on the continent (Best, 1986, 185). On April 30 the Western Union states formed a military committee to coordinate strategy. The clear goal in taking this step was to convince American government and congressional leaders that European states were working to provide for their own security. The British asked that the Military Committee invite American observers to its meetings in London; they arrived in June. The conclusion of military committee's preliminary work two weeks later stated that "[I]n the event of an attack by Russia, the five powers are determined to fight as far east in Germany as possible. Their preparations are aimed at holding the Russians on the best positions in Germany covering the territory of the five powers in such a way that sufficient time for American military power to intervene decisively can be assured" (Cook, 1989, 169).

The Outcome

The negotiation of the Brussels pact and the shift in British military strategy had an immediate influence on American policy. Bevin had received non-committal replies from American officials when he proposed consideration of an alliance in January and again in late February 1948. But Marshall replied positively the day after Bevin requested talks on the creation of an Atlantic Approaches Pact of Mutual Assistance, suggesting that negotiations could begin in Washington within the week. This was shortly after the commitment in British military strategy to have as a goal the defense of continental Europe in the event of war with the Soviet Union, rather than a retreat to the British Isles, Pyrennees, and Mideast. It also came six days after the start of talks on the Brussels pact between the western European countries, when American officials were quite certain the negotiations would conclude successfully. On March 17, the same day that the Brussels pact was signed, President Truman delivered the most positive public statement to date on the question of a military alliance, stating in an address before Congress that "This development deserves our full support. I am confident that the United States will, by appropriate means, extend to the free nations the support which the situation requires" (*Congressional Record*, 17 March 1948, 2996-8).

A more concrete American commitment came in the secret talks conducted at the Pentagon between the United States, Britain, and Canada between 22 March and 1 April. At the conclusion of these talks Hickerson proposed negotiating a formal alliance to include western Europe, North America, and north Atlantic states with a commitment to jointly resist attack (a summary of the Pentagon talks agreement is Department of State 1948, 72-5). Hickerson noted that this was not a formal commitment to ally but "only a concept of what is desired at the working level, and that British expectations should be based on nothing more than this" (quoted in Best, 1986, 165). However, there is substantial evidence that the Pentagon talks marked a high-level American commitment to proceed with the creation of an alliance, and that the subsequent delay in opening formal talks with European countries and ratification of the treaty in 1949 were driven by the administration's desire to build support for it in Congress and avoid injecting the proposal into the 1948 presidential election campaign. Reid (1977, 99) and Jebb (1972, 215), who were members of

the Canadian and British delegations to the Pentagon talks, imply that American officials insisted on keeping the talks secret and of treating the resulting Pentagon Paper as an informal working document not because they were unconvinced by the argument for alliance or internally divided on this question, but rather so that administration could go to Congress and build support for the idea before revealing that talks had taken place. Lovett met with British and French ambassadors on 19 April and asked them "not to nurse the impression that the US were backing away from their previous standpoint [in the Pentagon paper]. It was a question of the best way of presentation from the point of view of the US Congress and public opinion." Lovett also stated that his task would be made easier if they could provide "some visible proof that Western Europe was getting together to fight its own battles. He thought, therefore, that . . . the Brussels Treaty countries would have to provide him with information about their military plans and their actual and potential sources of military supplies." In response, the Brussels pact countries' defense ministers established a Military Committee on 30 April (Henderson, 1982, 23). Secretary of Defense James Forrestal's diary entry for 22 April (Forrestal, 1951, 423-4) indicates that senior decision-makers had decided to support conclusions of the Pentagon Talks. His entry summarizes a discussion in the National Security Council in which Lovett outlined tactics for gaining support for treaty of "to have action initiated by the Republicans and to have the ball picked up immediately by the President, who would state his interest in the plan..." This is exactly what happened. Marshall and Lovett met with Senator Vandenberg and John Foster Dulles, then still in private practice but an important Republican on foreign policy issues, and all agreed on basic idea of military alliance. They also agreed to secure support for such a step by having Vandenberg introduce a Senate resolution supporting European security efforts before having the Brussels Pact countries approach the President about forming an alliance and having the President agree to open negotiations. The Senate passed the Vandenberg resolution on 11 June which advocated "association of the United States, by constitutional processes, with such regional and other collective arrangements as are based on continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid". On 23 June the United States announced to the Brussels Pact countries it was willing to open secret negotiations one week later. Negotiators completed a draft treaty in September and the Senate ratified it in 1949 after the conclusion of the 1948 elections (Best, 1986, 168-72; Wiebes and Zeeman, 1983, 361-363).

Conclusions

This section briefly considers the ability of three alternative theoretical approaches to explain the decision on the part of the United States to negotiate the North Atlantic Treaty. The purpose is to demonstrate that, while these approaches may have empirical validity in other contexts, they do not explain the change in American foreign policy as well as the rationalist theory of persuasion developed in this paper.

The most widely accepted explanation for the existence of alliances is that states ally to balance against the rising power (Waltz, 1979) or threat (Walt, 1987) posed by another state. Many historical accounts hold that the perception of a Soviet threat motivated the decision to form the alliance. Henrikson (1980) and Petersen (1982, 96-8), for example, argue that the United States was unwilling to enter alliance until a series of crises—the Communist overthrow of the democratic government of Czechoslovakia in late February 1948, allegations of Soviet pressure on Norway and Finland in March 1948, and most importantly the Berlin crisis beginning in June 1948—led American decision-makers to conclude that alliance was the best way to maintain American influence on Europe.

At some fundamental level the American decision to ally was motivated by the perception of Soviet threat. However, this perception seems have had relatively little to do with concrete Soviet actions in late 1947 and early 1948. Many of the threatening events identified in the previous paragraph took place after the American decision to negotiate the North Atlantic Treaty in late March 1948, and this list overlooks a number of simultaneous perceived setbacks for the Soviets, such as failure in late 1947 of Communist-inspired strikes in France and Italy to bring down pro-American governments and the victory of the Christian Democrats in the Italian election of April 1948. American decision-makers response to the question of alliance was much more of a response to Bevin's call for such a step than to an objectively higher level of Soviet threat. Bevin was able to get some of his American counterparts to conclude that such a threat existed and that an alliance, rather than some other step, was the most effective response.

Theories of persuasion based on constructivism would seem to be the most powerful way to explain this ability to get American decision-makers to redefine the threats they faced and their preferred foreign policy actions. But a constructivist account of persuasion encounters two empirical difficulties. First, according to the constructivist account persuasion is most likely to be successful when the persuader draws on values shared with the target. Bevin's initial approach to Marshall in December 1947 drew heavily on shared values. Bevin called for the creation of an informal "spiritual federation of the west" among countries that shared democratic political institutions and practices. This appeal to common values was not meaningless rhetoric but instead shaped the content of Bevin's proposal in important ways. He argued that participation by Spain and western Germany would be crucial for the success of this "federation" but concluded that they could not be invited to join until the restoration of democracy. While Bevin used shared values and norms in his appeal, doing so seems to have had little effect on the Americans. Marshall's response to Bevin's argument in December 1947 was that, precisely because it was based on such norms, it was too vague to serve as a guide to action. It was only when the British proposals dropped the discussion of a "spiritual federation" and called for the creation of an alliance in January 1948 that the Americans were able to take them seriously. The second empirical difficulty is that many of the other variables that constructivist accounts of persuasion identify as important—such as norms of regular consultation out of the public eye—do not vary during this time period. British and American decision-makers did discuss issues of common concern very frequently in public and private during this period, and British diplomats were envied by their continental counterparts (particularly the French) for the access and influence they seemed to exercise in Washington. Such institutionalized consultation may have made British attempts at persuasion more likely to succeed than similar attempts from other countries, but cannot alone explain why British calls for an alliance were ignored by American decision-makers until early 1948 but picked up quickly thereafter.

I close by noting two challenges for those who take seriously the goal of explaining changes in ideas and beliefs. First, the implicit division of labor that has developed in theorizing about international politics, where theories based on constructivism explain changes in ideas while those based on rationalist premises explain strategic behavior, needs to be reconsidered. The theory of persuasion developed here is clearly rationalist in origin yet claims to explain ideational phenomena. To date constructivists have not taken seriously the possibility that theories based on rationalist premises might rival or complement their own theories, tending to evaluate constructivist theories of behavior against alternatives that do not treat ideas and beliefs as important (see, for example, Risse-Kappen 1995). Second, an important limitation of the theory of persuasion developed here is that, while it may explain changes in beliefs over which actions will allow the target to most effectively achieve objectives, it cannot explain why the target prefers some objectives to others. In other

words, it is a theory of changes in preferences over strategies, not outcomes. Constructivist theories of ideational change may be on strongest ground when they address more fundamental ideas and identities rather than strategies (but see Moravcsik, 1997).

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